FILM QUARTERLY

# Film Quarterly

FILM CULTURE | DIGITAL | BOOKS & DVDS

## SEX, POLITICS, MONTAGE: MAKAVEJEV REVISITED

## *BROKEN EMBRACES*

## *SWEETGRASS*

## FILMING INDONESIA: LEONARD RETEL HELMRICH

AVATAR, WALTZ WITH BASHIR

Volume 63 Number 3

0 74470 74075 9

Spring 2010 Volume 63 Number 3
$12.00 USA $13.00 Canada

# AMONG OUR CONTRIBUTORS

**Mark Fisher** is a writer and teacher. His work regularly appears in *Frieze*, *New Statesman*, *The Wire*, and *Sight and Sound*. He blogs at k-punk.abstractdynamics.org and is the author of *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* and the editor of *The Resistible Demise of Michael Jackson*, both published by Zero Books in 2009.

**Marsha Kinder,** a member of the *Film Quarterly* editorial board since 1977, has published three books on Spanish cinema and many essays on Pedro Almodóvar. Since 1980 she has been a professor at the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts, where she heads the Labyrinth Project, a research initiative on database documentary and digital scholarship.

**Scott MacDonald** is author of *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers*, now in five volumes from University of California Press, which also published his newest book, *Adventures of Perception: Cinema as Exploration—Essays/Interviews*, in 2009. He teaches and curates film events at Hamilton College.

**Paul Julian Smith** has been the Professor of Spanish in the University of Cambridge since 1991. He is the author of fifteen books, most recently *Spanish Screen Fiction: Between Cinema and Television* (Liverpool University Press, 2009), and was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2008. He was a juror at the 2009 Morelia International Film Festival. In the next issue, he will begin writing a regular column.

**Linda Williams,** also a member of the *Film Quarterly* editorial board, is the author of *Screening Sex* (Duke University Press, 2008), *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson* (Princeton University Press, 2002), and a contributor to *The Griffith Project* book series (BFI Publishing/Giornate del Cinema Muto).


EDITOR Rob White

CONSULTING EDITOR Ann Martin

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR Matthew H. Bernstein

EDITORIAL BOARD Christine Acham, Leo Braudy, Ernest Callenbach, Joshua Clover, Brian Henderson, Marsha Kinder, Akira Mizuta Lippit, D. A. Miller, Linda Williams

WRITERS-AT-LARGE James Naremore, Nina Power, Jonathan Rosenbaum, J. M. Tyree

CHIEF BOOK CRITIC David Sterritt

DESIGN Irene Imfeld

TYPESETTING Dickie Magidoff

ADVISORY BOARD NETWORK Mike Allen (Birkbeck College, University of London), Rick Altman (University of Iowa), Dudley Andrew (Yale University), Jennifer Bean (University of Washington), John Belton (Rutgers University), Chris Berry (Goldsmiths College, University of London), Charlotte Brunsdon (University of Warwick), Don Crafton (University of Notre Dame), Jane Gaines (Duke University), Lalitha Gopalan (University of Texas, Austin), Tom Gunning (University of Chicago), Heather Hendershot (Queens College), Charlie Keil (University of Toronto), Amy Lawrence (Dartmouth College), Hamid Naficy (Northwestern University), James Naremore (Indiana University), Diane Negra (University of East Anglia), Chon Noriega (University of California, Los Angeles), Abé Mark Nornes (University of Michigan), Patrice Petro (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), Joanna Rapf (University of Oklahoma), A.L. Rees (Royal College of Art), Philip Rosen (Brown University), Vivian Sobchack (University of California, Los Angeles), Lynn Spigel (Northwestern University), Janet Staiger (University of Texas, Austin), Shelley Stamp (University of California, Santa Cruz), Jacqueline Stewart (Northwestern University), Haidee Wasson (Concordia University), James S. Williams (Royal Holloway, University of London)

EDITOR'S READERS Richard Brown, Rob Cheek

COVER PHOTO Dušan Makavejev's *Sweet Movie*. Courtesy of The Criterion Collection.

EDITOR'S THANKS Brian Carmody, Leonard Retel Helmrich



*Film Quarterly* (ISSN 0015-1386, e-ISSN 1533-8630) is published quarterly by the University of California Press, Journals and Digital Publishing, 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223. Periodicals postage paid at Berkeley, CA, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Film Quarterly*, University of California Press, Journals and Digital Publishing, 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223. E-mail: customerservice@ucpressjournals.com.



Instructions for authors can be found on page 84.



See www.ucpressjournals.com for single issue and subscription orders, and claims information. Domestic claims for nonreceipt of issues should be made within 90 days of the mail date; overseas claims within 180 days. Mail dates can be checked at: www.ucpressjournals.com/ucpress.asp?page=ReleaseSchedule. University of California Press does not begin accepting claims for an issue until thirty (30) days after the mail date. Out of print issues and volumes are available from Periodicals Service Company, 11 Main Street, Germantown, NY 12526-5635. Phone number: (518) 537-4700. Fax number: (518) 537-5899. Web site: www.periodicals.com

Inquiries about advertising can be sent to adsales@ucpressjournals.com. For complete abstracting and indexing coverage for the journal, please visit www.ucpressournals.com. All other inquiries can be directed to customerservice@ucpressjournals.com.



Copying and permissions notice: Authorization to copy article content beyond fair use (as specified in Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law) for internal or personal use, or the internal or personal use of specific clients, is granted by The Regents of the University of California for libraries and other users, provided that they are registered with and pay the specified fee through the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC), www.copyright.com. To reach the CCC's Customer Service Department, phone (978) 750-8400 or write to info@copyright.com. For permission to distribute electronically, republish, resell, or repurpose material, and to purchase article offprints, use the CCC's Rightslink service, available on Caliber at http://caliber.ucpress.net. Submit all other permissions and licensing inquiries through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintInfo.asp, or via e-mail: journalspermissions@ucpress.edu.



Printed by Allen Press on Forest Stewardship Council-certified paper.



© 2010 The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved.



Mixed Sources
Product group from well-managed forests, controlled sources and recycled wood or fiber
www.fsc.org Cert no. SW-COC-002272
© 1996 Forest Stewardship Council

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING

Film Quarterly
Spring 2010 Volume 63 Number 3

## FEATURES

18 **FESTIVAL SPECIAL: MORELIA, MEXICO**
**Paul Julian Smith** reports on a rich crop of homegrown films at an event with an emphasis on young directors

23 **ONCE GRAZING, NOW GONE: *SWEETGRASS***
**Megan Ratner** discusses what makes a minimalist film about sheepherding so powerful

28 **RESTORING *BROKEN EMBRACES***
**Marsha Kinder** on cinema's resilience, intertextuality, and father–son relations in "Almodóvar's *8½*"

35 **INDONESIA IN MOTION: AN INTERVIEW WITH LEONARD RETEL HELMRICH**
**Scott MacDonald** talks to an innovative documentary-maker whose recent work deals with Islam's impact on Indonesia

42 **BLOOD AND SUGAR: THE FILMS OF DUŠAN MAKAVEJEV**
**Nina Power** revisits five radical, mixed-genre films from 1965–74 that explore sex and revolution

www.filmquarterly.org
www.ucpressjournals.com/fq

## DEPARTMENTS


4 **EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK**
MATTERS ARISING, CROSS-REFERENCES
*A Prophet*

6 **MARX AND COCA-COLA**
NEW RELEASES IN THEORY
**Joshua Clover** *Avatar, The Potentiality of Storming Heaven*

8 **NEW YORK NOTEBOOK**
NEW RELEASES, REPERTORY
**William Johnson** *Citizen Havel, La Danse: The Paris Opera Ballet, Flooding with Love for the Kid, The Wrestler*

10 **TALKING POINTS**
OPINION, DEBATE
**Paul Thomas** *Bright Star*
**Mark Fisher** *The Road*

52 **PORDENONE NOTEBOOK**
FESTIVAL REPORT
**Linda Williams** *The Canon Revisited*

55 **AVANT-GARDE**
EXPERIMENTAL FILM, VIDEO
**Danny Birchall** London Film Festival

58 **NONFICTIONS**
DOCUMENTARY, HYBRIDS
**Garrett Stewart** *Waltz with Bashir*

63 **REPROGRAMMING**
TELEVISION ON DVD
**Richard Beck** *Planet Earth*

82 **INTERTITLES**
FILM BOOKS
**Paul Thomas** *Lynching and Spectacle, Screening a Lynching*


## BOOK REVIEWS


67 **David Sterritt**
*Otto Preminger: The Man Who Would Be King* by Foster Hirsch | *The World and Its Double: The Life and Work of Otto Preminger* by Chris Fujiwara

69 **Joanna E. Rapf**
*The Final Victim of the Blacklist: John Howard Lawson, Dean of the Hollywood Ten* by Gerald Horne | *"Un-American" Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era,* ed. Frank Krutnik, Steve Neale, Brian Neve, and Peter Stanfield

71 **Martin Fradley**
*The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema,* ed. Daniel Bernardi | *Cinematic Identity: Anatomy of a Problem Film* by Cindy Patton

73 **Michael Aronson**
*Hollywood in the Neighborhood: Historical Case Studies of Local Moviegoing,* ed. Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley

74 **Francis G. Couvares**
*Nickelodeon City: Pittsburgh at the Movies, 1905–1929* by Michael Aronson

75 **David Laderman**
*How the West Was Sung: Music in the Westerns of John Ford* by Kathryn Kalinak

76 **Noah Isenberg**
*Edgar G. Ulmer: Detour on Poverty Row,* ed. Gary D. Rhodes

78 **Elizabeth A. Lathrop**
*Performing Illusions: Cinema, Special Effects and the Virtual Actor* by Dan North

79 **Alex Kupfer**
*Body Shots: Early Cinema's Incarnations* by Jonathan Auerbach

80 **Martin Fradley**
*Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics,* ed. Jeffrey Sconce | *Uncanny Bodies: The Coming of Sound and the Origins of the Horror Genre* by Robert Spadoni

# ONLY CONNECT

### *A Prophet* (Jacques Audiard)

Jacques Audiard's recent crime films can be called neurotic noir. In *Read My Lips*, the hearing-impaired secretary Carla stands naked in front of a grimy mirror—alone, repressed, uncertain in her dim apartment. Getting embroiled in robbery has an energizing (and aphrodisiac) effect on her; the danger and chicanery bring Carla back to life. Spivvy, piano-playing Thomas in *The Beat That My Heart Skipped* hits his head with frustration as he practices for an audition. Stage fright afflicts him on the day of the performance and later he fails again, botching an act of revenge. A pervading sense of anxiety is heightened both by such hints of sexual impairment and by breakdowns of communication. Carla must read her captured partner's lips through binoculars in order to rescue him; Thomas takes lessons from a Chinese pianist who speaks no French and he relies on broken English to taunt a Russian mobster.

At the start of *A Prophet*, Malik El Djebena arrives at a French jail to serve a six-year sentence. A warder asks him whether he originally spoke French or Arabic with his parents: "I wasn't with them," he replies uncomfortably. (We never learn if he is an orphan or an outcast.) It turns out, however, that he is a talented linguist. After he has been forced by Corsican inmates to murder an informer, he becomes first a fringe member of their yard gang and then—after he reveals to César, the boss, that he has learned Corsu and so can secretly monitor the others—a henchman. Malik is taunted by the Muslim prisoners because of this association, yet as the film progresses he draws closer and closer to them, gradually rediscovering his roots. His friendship with Ryad, whom he meets in the penitentiary classroom, is crucial to the conversion, and so is the strange imaginary bond he develops with the man he killed, who appears in fantasy sequences that punctuate *A Prophet* (in one, the dead man exhales cigarette smoke through his stitched-up throat wound).

Malik is another troubled outsider. As he contemplates what murder will entail, he paces his cell, biting his hand in panic. Much later, César—incensed that his lackey has developed a drug-dealing sideline—attacks him viciously with a spoon. The mood of abjection is never so great as in the point-of-view shot that soon follows, the boss's face distant and indistinct in the gaze of Malik's battered eye. "You live off me, El Djebena," César screams. "People look at you and see me." This dire encounter precedes a flickering dream (or maybe a premonition) of deer running at night and then another hallucination of the murder victim, who is garlanded by paraffin trails of blue fire.

It seems as if Malik may actually be going mad. But *A Prophet* takes its story in another direction, away from this deranged isolation and toward a triumphant sociability. (Spoiler warning: I will shortly describe the film's ending.) By the time of the cervine vision, César has arranged for Malik to be allowed occasional leave days during which he can conduct business on the Corsican's behalf (while surreptitiously building the drugs business with Ryad, already released). On one of these trips, he flies to Marseille to meet an Arab kingpin, who calls him a prophet after he shouts a warning about a deer on the road. A yearning to belong is unlocked in Malik when the gangster speaks warmly to him; he looks back in jubilation. The transformation is complete when, in a remarkable overhead gunfight image during his last excursion, he smiles ecstatically. The noise of the melee temporarily deafens him like Carla, but he too is revitalized. Now he can finish his journey from neurosis to solidarity by abandoning César and joining the Muslims.

He promises Ryad, dying of cancer, that he will look after Ryad's wife and son. The last shot of *A Prophet* shows Malik walking away from the prison with them, a surrogate father. It is somewhat like the end of *The Road* (see Mark Fisher's "Talking Point" essay), which also shows an adoptive family. The difference is that in its closing seconds Audiard's film unexpectedly depicts the force that backs up this family and alleviates Malik's jitters and nightmares.

⁘

Like *A Prophet*, James Cameron's *Avatar* (discussed by Joshua Clover in his "Marx and Coca-Cola" column) explores various social options for its protagonist, wheelchair-bound Jake, whose remote-controlled, genetically engineered alter ego gives this science-fiction epic its title. Instead of a foreign criminal gang or ethnic fraternity, *Avatar* includes a corpora-

*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3, pps 4–5, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.63.3.4

Family therapy
*A Prophet.* Photo: Roger Arpajou. Courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics.

tion, military brigade, research team, and pagan tribe. Both films are quest narratives featuring a scarred, athletic young man who breaks free from a racist father figure in order to achieve leadership and form a couple integrated within a traditional religious community.

During the Marseille expedition, Malik paddles in the sea; near the beginning of his trek into the jungle, Jake's proxy dives down a waterfall. These scenes suggest baptism. Another connection is relevant: Malik and Jake each have a joyous first experience of flight—Malik in an airplane, Jake on the back of a giant winged reptile. In *Avatar*'s opening voiceover, Jake talks about flying dreams: "sooner or later," he says, "you have to wake up." This reluctance to emerge from reverie implies a longing to be liberated from subjectivity. Baptism, then, but also another kind of immersion, a loss of self in some collective order of being; and, as Jake (called "dreamwalker" by the tribespeople) finds out, it may not be necessary to wake up—a virtual world can become the real world, its occupants relinquishing personal identity as a result.

Starting with the title's conjunction of mysticism (Hindu divine incarnation) and computer jargon (on-screen user graphic), *Avatar* evangelizes about online "techno-communion." The film imagines three specific types of connectivity. When Jake is plugged into his avatar machine, the process is called "the link." When his emissary unites by means of wirelike fronds with an animal, girlfriend, or the sacred Tree of Souls, it is termed "the bond." Finally, the tree itself is described as a supercomputer for metempsychosis, a "global network" of ancestral memory "data" which are "uploaded" by means of synapse-like "electrochemical communication between tree roots."

The extent to which you buy into this pantheistic paean to the Internet probably depends on how much the 3D experience enthralls you. Those who, like me, are skeptical about religiose ideas of virtual togetherness might care to try an experiment. Watch the 3D *Avatar* without the plastic spectacles and see how the screen becomes a mesh of shadows—figures and objects deformed by varying levels of blurry outlining (in order to seem to properly equipped eyes to protrude from the screen). The distortion is at its worst in medium shots that involve many people, shots that in their unfiltered state show a shimmering tangle of figures like a congregation of phantoms. Looked at this way, *Avatar*'s community appears shambolic, and prompts the thought that claims about the power of digital networks to transform social interaction are often tendentious, disclosing a familiar underlying impulse—that desire to belong and to be rid of self, carried away by the immersive flood.

**Rob White**

# THE STRUGGLE FOR SPACE

***Avatar* (James Cameron)**
***The Potentiality of Storming Heaven* (anon.)**

By common account, *Avatar* asks the great question of contemporary art, the one hip-hop has been asking unfailingly for some time: will we put up with a creepy worldview just because the sensuals are cool?

Critics have felt bound to qualify their admiration: the ecological parable is banal, the politics a sop to liberalism (or an outrage to the U.S. military, per the *National Review* et al., baited into weighing in), the treatment of indigenous people paternalistic—but c'mon folks, the reviews remind us, it's Hollywood. And the big-ticket, scrupulously eye-popping CGI, the advanced motion-capture, and IMAXed-out 3D are *amazing*.

Fortunately we are spared this exercise in moral judgment. Mostly the movie looks like a series of Roger Dean album covers from 1970s prog-rock albums, set in motion. The technology is improving, but the achievement does not yet feel like a profound change in our experience of cinematic volume equivalent to Greg Toland's deep focus, the introduction of CinemaScope, or the onset of the Steadicam. Yet there is no question that Cameron's use of 3D is peculiarly significant; it is the completion of something. It is the teleological end of the director's career rainbow; this is the film's garbled eloquence. The third dimension and the special effect named "James Cameron" are each other's context, without which the film is just *Ferngully: The 3D Rainforest*.

The invitation to read *Avatar* allegorically practically hangs on the marquee. Its only defense against this is to generate an allegory so chaotically inconsistent that one slinks away in defeat. The blue anthro-feline Na'vi, three meters tall, are not so much any indigenous people, but rather any number thereof: Native Americans in their natural harmony, or the Urarina of the Amazon rainforest—but no more these than, say, Iraqi natives (cued bluntly by the phrase "shock and awe"). Among these shifts, the oddest is when paraplegic corporate mercenary/incipient race traitor Jake Sully muses over how they are unlikely to throw over their world for "lite beer and jeans," and the Na'vi seem to be . . . East Germans?

*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3, pps 6–7, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.63.3.6

Meanwhile, the Na'vi spend a good deal of time hurling themselves about their terrain on Pandora for the sheer kinetics of it—basically, it's parkour as enlightenment. This provides the main occasion for Jake, jacked into his similarly catlike Na'vish body, and native princess Neytiri to fall for each other. She schools him in the practice of *tsaheylu*, a bond established by twining one's hairdo with that of a horse, or a pterodactyl. But the most profound bond is when the entire clan joins together with the nature goddess Eywa via the soul tree, a sort of fiber-optic server farm/arbor which allows practically global communion with the world spirit.

It's messy enough to be interesting: *spiritus mundi* as James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis as network society as true democracy. Ponderous, a bit. That is, if one can be bothered to take the scenario at all seriously; Caleb Crain writes the whole thing off as the "church of Facebook" (www.steamthing.com). But there is something to the eco-techno-blather that isn't entirely vacant. There's an argument there, albeit a bit simplistic: that what we might call "vertical jacking" (as Jake into his vat-grown avatar and, by extension, a terminal operator into a Predator drone in Afghanistan, or you into *Second Life*) is bad, as it takes the fundamental form of domination: one extending its will into another. Conversely, "horizontal jacking" (with its at least purported sharing of wills) is just fine; indeed, it's "natural," even if conducted via technological means. And it is in fact a necessity in the face of unnatural domination, providing an alter-globalization. Okay, we didn't say it was genius—but it is an idea, at least.

As an idea, it bears a curious relation to Cameron's body of work, which itself is organized by a single idea: the necessity of the augmented human body in the struggle against inhuman beings. The paradigmatic moment (one of this column's favorites; see "Dream Machines," winter 2007–08) is the final confrontation between Sigourney Weaver, strapped into an exoskeletal powerloader to fight the mother of all *Aliens*. Lest we miss it, *Avatar* pointedly returns both Weaver (as a no-nonsense but still maternal scientist) *and* the powerloader, almost comically referential but now even more bellicose.

But the theme is everywhere in Cameron, with variations of exactly the range to insist on the core structure. Consider Ed Harris's long descent into *The Abyss*, outfitted in his bespoke deep-dive pressure suit for an alien world he could not otherwise enter. Or Jessica Alba, playing the hero

of Cameron-produced series *Dark Angel*: a genetically modified soldier "with a dash of feline DNA . . . which makes me an awesome killing machine and a hoot at parties." *The Terminator* seems at first an inversion of the Cameron principle—a machine augmented toward the human—but one sees easily this is the same schema, neatly inverted. Consequently, Arnold flips teams in the sequel; how could he not? In Cameron's worlds, humans need an augmented hero or they simply cannot proceed. One is not surprised, then, by the full IMDb synopsis of Cameron's first writing and directing credit, the 1978 short *Xenogenesis*: "A woman and an engineered man are sent in a gigantic sentient starship to search space for a place to start a new life cycle. Raj decides to take a look around the ship. He comes across a gigantic robotic cleaner. Combat ensues."

The exception is a glaring one: Cameron's most famous effort to date, *Titanic*. There is the all-too-fragile Leonardo DiCaprio, the fulsomely human Kate Winslet, and no augmentation in sight. But this, surely, deserves the crown for "exception that proves the rule." After all, in what would become that film's signature moment, DiCaprio leans himself out on the bowsprit, one with the vessel. *The entire ocean liner must become his prosthetic*, so he can become "king of the world!" Inevitably, this is the line Cameron would repeat, discomfitingly, upon winning the Academy Award.

Though it appears couched in noble terms (often enough the preservation of the race) and never more so than in *Avatar*, the logic of augmentation is inevitably the logic of *king of the world*—of the domination of space. This is Cameron's visual stock in trade: the *Titanic* abreast the vast seas, the incredible chase sequence with titanic truck in *T3*, Alba's Max Guevara perched vertiginously high above Seattle in *Dark Angel*'s opening credits. And so the ballyhooed three-dimensionality of *Avatar* finally makes sense: a new space for James Cameron to assert dominion over—armed only with a quarter-billion dollars and all the technological augmentation it can buy. What happens to the Na'vi and humans is just a pretext for this drama, the anti-imperialist rhetoric a perfect inversion of Cameron's real logic. And the prosthetic eyes we all have to strap on just to take part are a kind of irony—the only *tsaheylu* paying customers are allowed (unless the payment itself is the real *tsaheylu*, a credit-card code twining around strands of digital uplink). To see the new world James Cameron is king of, we too have be augmented just a little.

*Avatar* could be called, by someone with quite a different turn of mind, *The Potentiality of Storming Heaven*. In fact that's the title of a half-hour documentary about the insurgencies in Greece, starting from the Exarcheia neighborhood of Athens, after the police murder of an unarmed teenager at the end of 2008. *Storming Heaven* is everything riot porn should be, terrifying and seductive, propaganda that knows itself as such, and has the courage of its convictions.

King of the jungle
*Avatar*. Courtesy of 20th Century Fox.

It seems a fair counterbalance to *Avatar*: it too is about imperialism and alter-globalization, about militarized corporate advance and counter-struggle. It ends in neither victory nor defeat, and does not suggest that one true-hearted renegade can make a difference. The bodies captured in lo-def have only the familiar augmentations: riot gear, improvised masks. It debuted not in an IMAX citadel but a squatted public library, and there is no way to pay for it (available on Google Video and similar sites). Nonetheless, the movie takes the way things look every bit as seriously; it has not abandoned the image either to Hollywood or to some pessimism of the spectacle.

There are passages that feel like they are about nothing so much as the fact that fire is beautiful—more so than anything *Avatar* can contrive. *Avatar*'s augmentation is, in the end, compensatory. Like Jake, jacked into a hyperkinesthetic body in complement to his human body's immobility, *Avatar* is "three-dimensional" in inverse proportion to the extent that it concerns the actual disposition of space. Its world, its situation, can be realized exactly because it bears no debt to the possible.

The resolute two-dimensionality of *Storming Heaven*, contrarily, indexes an actual struggle over space, with the real limits that implies. This does not interfere with its beauty; it allows it. Fire is perhaps always beautiful, but its beauty does not float free of what fire might do, in a given situation. It is not an aesthetic but a political fact.

JOSHUA CLOVER is the author of *1989: Bob Dylan Didn't Have This to Sing About* (University of California Press, 2009).

# RINGSIDE IN THE WINGS

***La Danse: The Paris Opera Ballet*** **(Frederick Wiseman)**
***Citizen Havel*** **(Miroslav Janek, Pavel Koutecký)**
***The Wrestler*** **(Darren Aronofsky)**
***Flooding with Love for the Kid*** **(Zachary Oberzan)**

Ballet is not my favorite art form, but I had no hesitation about going to see Frederick Wiseman's latest film, which has a running time of just over two and a half hours. Yet unlike the many other works of his I've seen it turned out to be a peculiarly mixed success, both brilliant and flawed.

The brilliance of *La Danse* stands out first of all because Wiseman takes more time focusing on the inner workings of the ballet company than on the completed ballets they perform. The most fascinating scenes are those in which dancers rehearse segments in a large room made to look even larger (and visually arresting) by a mirror that covers one entire wall. The rehearsals may range from a single dancer to a duo or an ensemble, but the crucial point is that one or more teachers are there and continually break in to suggest improvements. (Since Wiseman is always open to the quirky and unexpected, it's not surprising that one of the male teachers has a Cockney accent.)

Thanks to that close focus on detail and the generous time allotted to its variety of styles and techniques, viewers like me who know little or nothing about the subtleties of dancing can appreciate far more about it here than in watching an uninterrupted ballet. We can, for example, see the difference it makes to a brief and rapid combination of steps when the teacher tells a dancer to raise her heel by an inch. Wiseman reveals the demanding complexity that lies behind what can look on stage like effortless skill.

The film goes on to include seven full ballets, mostly modern, which give viewers a chance to test their own appraisal of subtleties.

Away from the dancing Wiseman spends time in the office of the Ballet's artistic director, Brigitte Lefèvre, where she talks with a choreographer planning a new dance, a dancer who's concerned that at her age she has difficulty dancing *en pointe* (on the tips of her toes), and an assistant who will be arranging a special visit for Americans who have contributed to the Ballet's funds. Later Lefèvre meets informally with her dancers to announce current provisions for retirement pay, which include the option to retire at forty. So far, so fascinating. Where are the flaws I hinted at earlier?

The film has been punctuated from time to time with morning and night views from the roof of the Opéra. During the last half-hour such views become longer, more frequent, and less valid as punctuation. Meanwhile the camera is meandering here and there around the interior, stopping briefly at the Ballet's cafeteria and the dressmaking section but otherwise seeming to have lost its way. For the first time I became impatient for a Wiseman film to end. But I still look forward to his next.

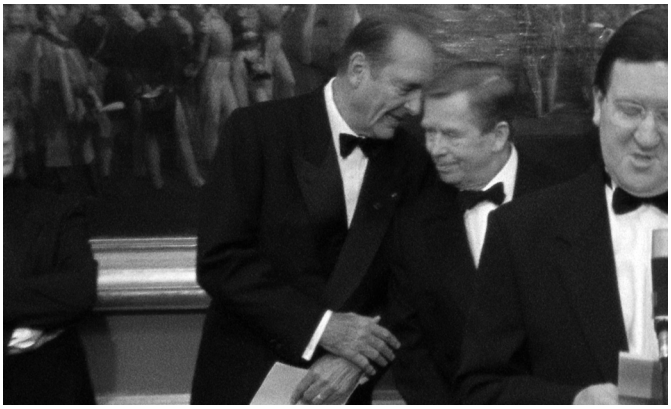
⁂

Few countries have had such a short, turbulent, and yet impressive history as the Czech Republic (formerly partnered with Slovakia). Like other areas of central Europe set adrift by the collapse of Austria–Hungary during World War I, Czechoslovakia contained a mixed population. Most central Europeans on the losing side were sent to their appropriate loser, while the rest (as in Czechoslovakia) found themselves under the increasing influence of the Soviet Union. Because young Václav Havel (born 1936) belonged to a wealthy bourgeois family he was not allowed to go to a university after graduating from high school.

He did however become a well-known writer of poetry and particularly of plays. He was also prepared to confront the increasing number of Czech and Slovak politicians who were siding with communism, even though he was imprisoned several times. By the 1980s there were enough other citizens who felt the same for them to launch what was called the Velvet Revolution—an abrupt political shift that brought Havel to the country's presidency. And it is with his unaccustomed role as president that this documentary begins.

Havel was not directly involved in the daily to and fro of parliament, which was presided over by Alexander Dubček, a disenchanted former Communist. Havel's concerns were more general and international. *Citizen Havel* also makes it clear that he was far from being a typical politician. He allows the filmmakers almost complete access to his private and political life. There are many planning discussions with his advisers where they often say he can't possibly do something he's proposed and he talks his way around to some acceptable alternative. He tosses in jokes at tense moments. When an important-looking man comes to present some lengthy plea

*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3, pps 8–9, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.63.3.8



Jacques Chirac confers with Václav Havel
*Citizen Havel*. Photo: www.obcanhavel.cz.

and asks for a second drink, Havel gets up to pour it himself, while the embarrassed visitor says, "Couldn't one of your film people get it?"

Everyone around Havel seems free to speak his mind. True, there are no women advisers, and the film includes no discussions between Havel and his handsome, intelligent-looking, and popular wife Olga. (One blunder in the film is a shocking cut from Olga alive to her casket. The original filmmaker, Pavel Koutecký, died in an accident before having fully edited the footage, and Miroslav Janek had to take over as best as he could.)

Two events in the film show the range of Havel's responsibilities as president. In 1983 the Slovaks decided to form their own separate country. Havel had hoped they would remain part of Czechoslovakia, but he travels to Slovakia and makes a gracious farewell speech. On a very different note, Havel welcomes Bill Clinton to Prague with the gift of a saxophone and later takes him to a jazz club where Clinton performs with the band.

The film ends with Havel retiring from the presidency in 2003. Today, at seventy-three, he is still writing and speaking out against injustice and compromise.

⁘

In choosing films for this notebook I rely almost entirely on venues that skip major releases and focus on less widely shown films: foreign, documentary, experimental, and otherwise offbeat. But recently I was blindsided by a remarkable film on TV that seemed to come out of nowhere. In reality, it had had a wide release, its male lead was nominated for an Academy Award in 2008, and somehow it slid by me without leaving a trace. The film was *The Wrestler* and the male lead was Mickey Rourke, with Robert D. Siegel as writer and Darren Aronofsky as director. For someone who's normally awash with information about films not yet seen I had the rare experience of knowing nothing about the film in advance.

I'd seen two of Aronofsky's earlier films, *Pi* and *Requiem for a Dream*, both about addicts, but was not quite impressed enough to follow up on him. *The Wrestler* was an eye-opener. Visually the film gives the impression of being the work of a persistent documentarian deft enough to handhold an unshaky camera for as long as needed, jolting the film with an extraordinarily intense feeling of immediacy, continuity, and going for broke that Rourke's performance more than matched.

Rourke lost out to Sean Penn for his performance as Harvey Milk in Gus Van Sant's *Milk*. I saw that film twice and felt that the script was hampered by too much repetition, failing to develop the cumulative power that it deserved. But when Academy members are voting, how many are likely to choose a brilliant sleazeball performance over an assassinated hero?

⁘

Many years ago I used to enjoy visits to Anthology Film Archives, New York City's ultimate refuge of experimental and offbeat films. Deciding to visit the AFA again I picked its newest offering, which was quite different from the works of Maya Deren, Warren Sonbert, Hollis Frampton et al. The extraordinary achievement of Zachary Oberzan's just over ninety-minute film is not so much that he scripted, designed, lighted, recorded, and shot it all by himself in his New York City apartment at a cost of $96, but that he also played all of the around twenty characters, even when there were up to five or six of them interacting and talking on screen at once.

The film is based on the novel *First Blood* by David Morrell, and deals with a young man named Rambo whose clash with a small-town sheriff in Kentucky escalates into a one-man war with the state police. Although most of the action is indoors, Oberzan is prepared (for example) to improvise a helicopter for two airborne policemen (in front of a well-lighted white wall of his apartment as a convincing open sky).

To help differentiate his characters, Oberzan first let his hair grow long (for the few females) and then cut it several times and in different styles for the males. His choices of clothes, postures, accents, styles of speech, and improvised weapons also helped to show who was supposed to be who.

I must confess that my fascination with the sheer logistic complexity of Oberzan's solo enterprise made it difficult for me to follow all of the ins and outs of the plot. That didn't prevent the film from being a thrilling and mind-boggling experience.

WILLIAM JOHNSON is a former New York Editor of *Film Quarterly*.

# BROWN VS. BRAWNE: *BRIGHT STAR*

Try this for sheer unexpectedness. After their Christmas dinner at Wentworth Place in Hampstead Village—it is 1818—the fatherless Brawne family and their guest, Mr Keats, settle down to enjoy a parlor game. Each person around the table, in unison, stirs his or her coffee cup three times to the left, three times to the right, then taps the rim of the cup three times with the spoon, raises the cup from the saucer, blows three times on the coffee, then puts the cup down . . . Jane Campion's *Bright Star* abruptly lets (or drops) us in on this utterly unexpected family ritual. It is a moment for which her audience has no way of preparing itself, a moment not dwelt on, just glimpsed. But it is not as inconsequential a moment as it may seem. The second time I saw *Bright Star* I looked around me at the faces of my fellow patrons at this moment in the film, and noticed that their expressions shifted from incredulity and discomfiture to pleasure—the simple kind of pleasure that spreads itself—and that they all shifted at exactly the same time. I could tell from the smiles on their faces (and from the smile on my own) that Campion's audiences enjoy this fleeting moment in just the same way as her characters do on the other side of the camera.

This is the kind of move, a move more deft and confident than disconcerting, that filmmakers attempt very rarely. It establishes a moment of contact between cast and spectator that is possible only when the cast is working as a collective, as from all accounts Campion's cast did on *Bright Star*. Jean Renoir does something similar at least twice in what was his most "collective" film, *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*. When the schoolchildren converge on the Parisian newsstand for the latest episode of the *Arizona Jim* serial, their elation becomes that of the audience too; and when, in the party scene, the concièrge Besnard (Marcel Levesque), who is in his cups, sets about regaling his courtyard neighbors with his sentimental song, "C'est la nuit de Noël" for the *second* time, the groans that emanate from Renoir's cast and those of every *Lange* audience I've ever sat among are one and the same. At moments like this—they are few and far between—barriers are briefly overcome, barriers that to most directors simply come with the territory and are conditions of existence.

But even if Jane Campion is not the director to rest content with such barriers, there is no equivalent in *Bright Star* of Renoir's mise-en-scène. *Bright Star*'s mise-en-scène is undemonstrative to the point of abruptness. It is also a film that confounds audience expectations by deliberately not setting out to enhance anyone's appreciation of Keats's poetry. And if Campion is prepared to forego mise-en-scène and dispense with Keats appreciation, these do not exhaust the risks run by *Bright Star*. Its chronology is muddy, for one thing; characters like John Reynolds and Charles Dilkes appear and disappear for no apparent reason; and Fanny Brawne's brother Samuel is given nothing to do except get taller, while her nine-year-old Pre-Raphaelite sister Margaret (Edie Martin)—everyone calls her "Toots"—almost steals every scene she's in. (Keats asks her whether she's been "eating rosebuds again," her cheeks are so ruddy.) More generally, *Bright Star* tacks in dangerously close to reefs and shoals marked clearly on the charts as danger zones if not disaster areas: the period costume drama, the romantic hero, the anguished, misunderstood genius, young love frustrated by uncomprehending elders as well as by untimely death—need I go on?

Yet for all this Campion tacks cannily, pulling back from the danger zones she skirts. It comes as no surprise that Abbie Cornish's Fanny Brawne takes a craftsman's pride in her "triple-pleated mushroom collar," or that she never wears the same outfit twice. (She was not Beau Brummel's niece for nothing.) It was even predictable, perhaps, that Brawne, Keats's "minxstress" who is the real center of *Bright Star*, would become one of Campion's strong, complicated women. Brawne's sewing, Campion is on record as saying (with all due feistiness), is "a metaphor for women's lives: nobody gives a damn." The hostility to Brawne's craft to which Campion refers emerges in *Bright Star* not from Keats, though he is much less interested in her craft than she is in his. The hostility erupts instead from the third person in the triangle, Charles Armitage Brown (played to the hilt by Paul Schneider in a broad Scots burr and preposterous tartan trews), who is both protective of Keats and proprietary about his poetry. Brown, not Keats, is the aesthete in *Bright Star*, valuing vocation over matrimony and high art over life, life as the enemy of promise. *Bright Star* encourages our belief that Brown's solicitude for Keats and hostility to Brawne is not motivated solely by her potential to derail Keats's career. Brown at all events is oafish, glowering, smoldering, and overbearing. Every one of his absences from the screen, however brief, comes as a relief. Even so, it is not Ben Whishaw's

*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3, pps 10–13, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.63.3.10

Conviviality, tension, peacefulness

*Bright Star*. © 2009 Pathé Productions Limited, Screen Australia, British Broadcasting Corporation, UK Film Council, New South Wales Film and Television Office and Jane Chapman Productions Pty Ltd. DVD: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

Keats, who quivers and bristles but stays shy and limpid, but instead Brown in one way, and Toots in another, who see to it that Cornish, an extraordinarily good film actress, doesn't steal the show entirely.

But Campion awards Brown's tussle with Brawne pride of place. Early on in the film, incensed by one of his slurs about her fashionista tendencies, Brawne flatly and disconcertingly refuses to shake hands with Brown at Wentworth Place, and the friction established here is never resolved. To the extent that Keats plays no part in the tart-tongued banter between these protagonists, he is displaced—and the idea of Keats as a character in a film rather than its centerpiece has proven too much for some of his champions among the literary professoriat, notably Christopher Ricks in the *New York Review of Books* (see "Undermining Keats," December 17, 2009). I cannot agree with Colin MacCabe in the pages of this journal (fall 2009) when he claims that Keats's poetry "gets in the way of" *Bright Star*. Campion uses the poetry sparingly to punctuate, and more rarely (and perhaps unfortunately), to illustrate the film, not the film the poetry. The poetry she works into *Bright Star*, that is to say, is never central to it, and this is enough to ruffle the feathers of Ricks, for whom "the question is whether Campion's imagination mines Keats's art or undermines it." This stark way of posing "the" question leaves *Bright Star* high and dry, and leaves Ricks seething with indignation at a Keats dislodged from the

## REGENCY SIGHTS, SOUNDS, AND SORROWS

*Bright Star*. © 2009 Pathé Productions Limited, Screen Australia, British Broadcasting Corporation, UK Film Council, New South Wales Film and Television Office and Jane Chapman Productions Pty Ltd. DVD: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

position of centrality he ought to occupy in any film where he appears. Ricks tells us of a panel discussion of *Bright Star* held under the auspices of the Keats-Shelley Association of America. One can only shudder to imagine what this discussion was like, if "Undermining Keats" is anything to go on. Ricks regards *Bright Star* as "the condescending granting of pictorial assistance to words that were designed to stand in no need of support from a sister art." One might suspect, however, that the condescension is all Ricks's, when he loftily disdains *Bright Star*'s "fatuous supplementation" of Keats, and declares the film guilty of "an infidelity to his manners, his voice, his humors, and his art." Not only is this, in my opinion, precious beyond belief; Ricks, for all the force of his speculations about "visualization," appears not to notice what is going on in Campion's film. Charles Armitage Brown is not so much as mentioned in "Undermining Keats." Perhaps Brown is a little too close to the bone for Ricks?

The truth of the matter, I suspect, is that no film can successfully take us inside the process by which poetry or art is produced, and that for her part Campion, sensibly, does not even try to do this. Her presumption is that Keats's poetry is good enough to look after itself and should be left free to do so. Moreover, Campion has an answer in *Bright Star* to those who, like Ricks, think her film dishonors or derogates Keats by not revolving in a stately manner around his poetry. Her answer is Charles Armitage Brown. *Bright Star* discredits the pompous, belletristic concerns of the aesthete by exposing their dark side, the pontification and bullying of Brown. What is at stake in the confrontation of Brawne and Brown is the distinction between delicacy, grace, workmanship, family, and community on the one hand, and bombast and didacticism on the other. (It is Brawne, we should remember, who has intellectual curiosity and openness on her side, not Brown.) There can be no question where Campion comes down on this issue. Her Keats, too, is at his happiest and most relaxed among the Brawnes; he breaks a prior commitment in order to spend Christmas with them. (When at the end of the film an otherwise *distrait* Mrs Brawne, played by Kerry Fox, at last won over, says to Keats as he leaves for Italy, "You must come back and marry our Fanny," this is both the kindest and the cruelest line in the film).

Critics like Ricks who center their attention on Keats tend to treat his "life and times" in a proprietary manner, as though these really were Keats's and Keats's alone. Jane Campion makes no such assumption, which is perhaps why *Bright Star* begins as abruptly as it does, by plonking its spectators *in medias res*. We see a back garden with ducks and mud underfoot, with bed linen flapping in the wind—the same linen through which Keats is to pace back and forth in the rain once Brown's valentine to Brawne has had its desired effect and provoked his jealousy, and the same linen we later see mottled with his arterial blood. There is little that is picturesque about the Regency England seen here. *Bright Star* does not encourage us cheaply to latch on to its characters by portraying a, or the, "world we have lost." It is no showpiece. But it is attentive to the sights, sounds, and rhythms life must have had in 1818. It shuns the period clichés directors of many period dramas use as grappling irons. We are never far from the textures of its everydayness. The sound is naturalistic and close-miked. There is little music, and what there is (Mozart's Serenade, K361) is played none too expertly. It is music as music would have been heard at that time, in that place, by those characters—as is the oddly endearing vocal music of the Hampstead Heathens. Natural light is used as much as possible. Characters read by the daylight that comes in through windows. This gives some compositions a sub-Vermeer quality—but *very* sub-Vermeer, since Campion's (or her director of photography Greig Fraser's) are not too carefully composed or centered. We see what we would see if we happened upon it by chance, by turning a corner inside a very lived-in Wentworth Place. The texture of the Brawnes' close-knit Hampstead village has to contrast with the chilling, impersonal austerity of Keats's lonely funeral in the Piazza di Spagna in Rome, and contrast it does. But visual effects, like sound effects, and poetic effects too, are not strained after in *Bright Star*. It is not a film that stands on ceremony.

Lovers and poets may create their own realms of feeling and significance, but are constrained to do so in the same world inhabited by everyone around them, the world as a reality that has to be negotiated, not shunned or spurned or rejected in the name of "genius" or the solemn male game of poetry. Negotiating the lived-in world depicted by Campion involves an embroidery-like attention to detail (*Bright Star*'s titles show an extreme close-up of a needle, thread, and cloth), an accumulation of small gestures and finite pleasures (the parlor game again—no wonder it reminded me of moments in Renoir). *On se débrouille*, as the French say: you manage, you cope, you get by, you make do, and that way your life "adds up" and signifies. This lived-in world is where Campion as craftsman and Brawne as seamstress overlap in a penumbra that briefly encloses Keats too—not the Keats of literary legend, the transcendent, sublime figure, but the finite historical one who interests Campion, the Keats who got under the guard of a "mere" seamstress, as she got under his.

PAUL THOMAS is a longtime *Film Quarterly* contributor and "Intertitles" columnist.

# THE LONELY ROAD

A new kind of apocalypse emerges in Cormac McCarthy's 2006 novel, *The Road*. Nature here is not an active presence which verdantly reclaims former human habitations, as in a certain apocalyptic tradition which started with Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*. Rather, nature asserts itself by failing any more to be the invisible support upon which any conceivable human life-world depends. A catastrophe has happened—McCarthy doesn't explain what it is because, for those who endured it, the catastrophe *would* be inexplicable, a sudden and total destruction of the taken-for-granted network of cause and effect upon which all narratives (about life, society, the world) had up until then relied. It is an eco-catastrophe, which, like a reverse neutron bomb, destroys everything—plants, trees, animals—except people. This is bitterly ironic if, as might be the case, the catastrophe has been caused by human action. What we can be sure of is that human action cannot now put it right. Nothing can. Such hope as there is in *The Road* is not based on reason; how could it be? The hope that persists is either hardwired into the organism itself, a stupid ineradicable drive to persist in conditions where death would be preferable, or it is some kind of Gnostic religious impulse, a faith in a distant and unknowable God that has, to all appearances, abandoned the Earth. The two, unnamed central characters—the father and son whose desperate struggles we follow—refer to themselves as "carrying the fire," that spark which makes human existence more than bare life, and which distinguishes them from the cannibalistic brutes around them who will do anything to survive. McCarthy's Hobbesian Protestantism emerges in its starkest form in *The Road*, where the world is ash and the stars are dimmed. Earth has becomes a dead crust; the dark, heavy matter that the Gnostics thought was the lowest form of being has now reached its most degraded state. "All the beings of our world are, in the eyes of the Gnostics, the sediment of a lost heaven," Jacques Lacarriere writes in *The Gnostics* (City Lights, 2001, 19). "And from the bottom of this dark sea, man perceives nothing of the luminous surface of the upper world except in ephemeral forms, evanescent phantoms which are like phosphorescent fish that alone illuminate the age-old darkness of the great ocean depths. And our matter, because it is heavy, because it is dark—the darkest and heaviest of all—is also the least dynamic, the most immobile, as fixed and as heavy as atoms reduced to their nuclei. Immobility, the glacial cold of matter and flesh deprived of primal fire and sinking ineluctably towards that absolute zero which is the final stage of material death." With all the dead forms on which we have lived now used up, Earth in *The Road* is a burned-out husk that approaches this "final stage of material death," tending toward total entropy and inertia.

John Hillcoat's reverent film adaptation renders very convincingly McCarthy's vision of an environment reduced to shades of ash grey. The problem is not so much what Hillcoat leaves out, but what he adds. In the *Guardian* (January 7, 2010), Peter Bradshaw complained that the film has omitted an incident from the novel where parents eat the remains of their own infant child's corpse; but this is one of the few moments in the book which has a touch of the Grand Guignol, and its removal does little to soften the horror. What does soften it is the addition of a voiceover, which as Bradshaw pointed out, "has a calming, distancing function, no matter what revulsions are being described." The very form of the voiceover presumes a time of tranquillity when the man could look back and reflect on his tribulations, but there is no such time in *The Road*. McCarthy's novel is harrowing because its post-apocalypse is not a time of interregnum, a temporary interruption in civilization preceding its restoration: it is the long, drawn-out end. Things are already appallingly, unbearably bad, but they can only get worse. The voiceover form presumes a future audience that has weathered the terrible storm where none can feasibly be imagined. Even Anne Frank had the (in the end justified) hope that the time of Nazi barbarism would pass and that her writings would be read by a sympathetic audience. But in *The Road*, language itself is dying and those who speak it will surely be extinct within a very few generations. "The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities," McCarthy writes (Picador, 2007, 93). "The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally the names of things one believed to be true. More fragile than he would have thought."

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, a key concept is that of the "big Other"—an imagined judge whom we try to impress or convince, and whose virtual presence gives social reality its consistency. What is so inappropriate about the voiceover is

*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3, pps 14–17, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.63.3.14

Nostalgic consumption
*The Road*. Photo: Macall Polay, 2929/Dimension Films. Courtesy of The Weinstein Company.

that it implies a big Other to whom it is addressed. Yet *The Road* shows that, virtual as the big Other may be, it depends on concrete representatives: institutions, shared social conventions, language itself. When these disintegrate, it dies too. Viggo Mortensen's man has divested himself of illusions—the environment he exists in cannot sustain them, that is part of its horror—so it is hard to believe that he could hold onto the illusion that there is anyone out there who could listen to his account. The voiceover is as incongruous as Nick Cave and Warren Ellis's mournful music, which also strikes the wrong note. The world of *The Road*, clearly, is a world in which mournfulness is a luxury—but it is a luxury which the film's marketing felt it could not do without. The Weinstein Company press notes tell us how "poignant" the film is, but "poignant" is not a word that comes to mind much when you read the novel. The shared, symbolic domain in which poignancy could be meaningful has been shattered. Hillcoat's view that the film "can be viewed as a more mythic metaphoric journey of the soul, a fable, an adult fairytale about the passing of one generation to another, that inescapable reality of mortality and the archetypal parent's greatest fear, guilt and heartbreak in leaving the child behind" neutralizes the novel's horrific sense of impending extinction, which is both unthinkable and yet horribly plausible. It will happen eventually, and, when it does, the "passing of one generation to another" will only be an excruciating extension of the process of extinction itself.

Post-apocalyptic fictions, as Fredric Jameson has noted, have often been pretexts for imagining utopia. Yet *The Road*—like *Children of Men*, perhaps the most interesting post-apocalyptic film of recent years—is instead a symptom of the inability to imagine alternatives to capitalism's entropic, eter-

nal present. In *Children of Men*, the world might be ending, but capitalism goes on—franchise coffee bars and internment camps coexist. In *The Road*, capitalism has definitively ended, but this by no means clears a space for imagining something different. Rather, as we watch the film we feel very intensely the absence of capitalism's structures, institutions, and—especially—commodities. Capitalism and its lost commodities *themselves* becomes posited as a utopia: the can of Coke that the man shares with his son in a significant scene stands in for a whole world of commodity plenty that there is now no longer any point pining for. What is left over from capitalism, however, is its sense of individualism: a dogged and resourceful frontier spirit that persists even though there are no frontiers left to conquer, only the corpse of nature and the few remaining products of dead human labor to pick over. The man and the boy exist in a world in which Margaret Thatcher's dictum has come true: here there really is no such thing as society, only individuals and their families. Well, that isn't quite right, actually: in addition to individuals and families, there are organized gangs of cannibals, and I will return to this figuration of collectivity shortly.

We are confronted with humanity in a version of what Hobbes supposed to be its natural state. In the section of *Leviathan* preceding his famous description of life as "nasty, brutish, and short," Hobbes writes of: "a time of Warre, where every man is Enemy to every man, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own inventions shall furnish them withall. In such conditions, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the earth, no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society, and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death" (part 1, chapter 13). All of which captures the situation in *The Road* very well; except that *The Road* is much worse than the infernal strife that Hobbes imagined. For Hobbes, it would still possible for humans to remove themselves from the state of nature, precisely by submitting themselves to the authority of a big Other, the sovereign. Whereas in *The Road*, the end of nature also entails the end of the big Other. No sovereign could replenish this wasteland. The death of nature here means that the conditions of perpetual war which Hobbes imagines can never end. The strange implication is that only when nature has perished can human beings actually descend into the state of nature: only then can they emerge as what they "really are." But such purported definitions of the true nature of humanity are invariably ideological operations and this goes for McCarthy's bleak fiction, and its adaptation, too.

As contemporary capitalism tries to do, *The Road* forecloses the possibility of collectivity. When, in the aftermath of the catastrophe, the man and his wife stay locked down in their own house, you wonder why it is that they didn't go to neighbors, friends, or extended family—why, that is, their first impulse wasn't to band together with others to deal with the terrible new situation. This possibility is not considered in *The Road*, either in the novel or the film. Instead there are only loners, who are either helpless or hostile; gangs who only organize together in order to exploit others; and—albeit only in the novel and the film's closing moments—another family. The novel refers, very much in passing, to communes: the character called the thief in the film, played by

Birth in a barren land

*Threads*. © 1984 BBC. DVD: BBC Worldwide (U.K.).

Michael Kenneth Williams, is referred to by McCarthy as "an outcast from one of the communes" (273), but even this tiny implied trace of possible positive collectivity is expunged by Hillcoat. The boy repeatedly wonders if he and his father are still "the good guys"—a question which hangs in the air because, time and again, the man refuses to help others or to consort with them except in very limited ways or for a very short periods of time.

In the novel, the man reflects on the power of traumatic images. "Just remember that the things you put into your head are there forever" (11), the man tells his son. ("You forget some things dont [sic] you?" the boy asks. "Yes. You forget what you want to remember and you remember what you want to forget," his father replies: the mordant wisdom of this world without a future.) There are of course shocking moments in Hillcoat's film—one thinks especially of the scene in which the man and the boy stumble into a darkened cellar where people are being stored as living meat—but there are no images here quite so harrowing as those in Barry Hines's 1984 British TV drama, *Threads*. Reading McCarthy's novel, I was frequently reminded of *Threads*, whose cataclysm is the result of a nuclear war, but which is devoid of even the thin redemptive promise that *The Road* feebly holds out. Many of the images in *Threads*—of a woman giving birth in a brutal new world in which language has devolved to grunts; of the haggard survivors generations after the war, pathetically hoeing toxic, unyielding soil—are indeed likely to remain in my head forever, having long since fused with nightmare. But even in such conditions of utter horror, *Threads* remains concerned with problems of collectivity, of how society could reconstruct itself when all the "threads" that had previously held it together have been obliterated; the same is true of Terry Nation's less harrowing series, *Survivors*, which originally ran between 1975–77. (The BBC is currently screening a high-gloss remake.) In *Survivors*, nature is not destroyed; instead a swine flu-like virus has killed nine-tenths of the human population. With 1970s ecopolitics in the background, the major questions that *Survivors* posed were all about collectivity: how are resources to be conserved, how is labor to be organized. Such questions are meaningless in *The Road*, where conservation of resources can only temporarily stave off their inevitable total depletion, and where, in the absence of any raw materials for production, labor can only amount to scavenging.

What is missing from *The Road* can also be inferred by contrast with a more recent apocalyptic thriller, *Terminator Salvation*. All of the criticisms of McG's renewal of the franchise for its lack of plot or character development are no doubt justified. But there is something deeply resonant about

The fightback?
*Terminator Salvation*. © 2009 T Asset Acquisition Company LLC. DVD: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment (U.K.).

*Terminator Salvation*'s imagery at the moment. In the wake of the financial crisis of 2008, we find ourselves surrounded by what the theorist Alex Williams has called "ideological rubble": the neoliberal "End of History" has been debunked, but we are not in a new world so much as a bombed-out space, strewn with the debris of failed political-economic systems. After the financial crisis, neoliberalism can no longer claim to offer the only system that works; it, too, is now a relic, albeit a relic that still dominates our current (post-catastrophic) world. *Terminator Salvation*'s cybergothic, Black Metal vision gives mythic form to this desertified political terrain. The film pitches us into the future war that, in the earlier films, we have only seen in glimpses, this future war between embattled human collectives and the cyborg armies of techno-capital presaging a new struggle over the present. *The Road*, like *Threads*, acts as a kind of negative inspiration—after living with such horror in fictional form, we feel that we would do anything to avoid it occurring in actuality. *Terminator Salvation* is galvanizing in a different way. What is its pulp existentialist slogan, "There is no fate but what we make," if not an alternative way of saying that, against all the odds, another world is possible?

MARK FISHER is the author of *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Zero Books, 2009).

# FESTIVAL SPECIAL: MORELIA, MEXICO

## PAUL JULIAN SMITH REPORTS ON A RICH CROP OF HOMEGROWN FILMS AT AN EVENT WITH AN EMPHASIS ON YOUNG DIRECTORS

The seventh Morelia International Film Festival, which ran from October 3–11, 2009, is unique for a number of reasons. For one thing it takes place in an exquisite Mexican colonial town, all pink stone and baroque curlicues. Even the press office is housed in an eighteenth-century building. And while most press and commercial screenings take place in the enviably modern Cinépolis Centro theaters, complete with stadium seating and digital projection, free shows are also held for the general public in such historic sites as the small square in the shadow of the majestic twin-towered cathedral. Keeping close to its origins as a showcase for shorts and documentaries, the festival has now expanded to include Mexican features, both in competition (for which your correspondent served as a juror) and out, as well as foreign premieres. Stellar international guests (Todd Haynes last year, Quentin Tarantino this) are combined with a continuing commitment to homegrown production. The latter includes a strand for films made in Morelia's home state of Michoacán and, this year, an homage to a local star: Fanny Cano, the 1960s siren of sex comedies with titles like *How to Hook a Husband* (*Como pescar marido*).

Focused on the present (the feature competition is restricted to first or second films by young directors), still the festival investigates the past. Another special strand, sponsored by the Mexican Association of Women in Film and Television, celebrated pioneering female directors with Dorothy Arzner from the U.S. playing alongside Adela Sequeyro from Mexico. And it is rare for any film festival to have such a strong academic focus. The Mexican Society of Film Theory and Analysis (whose Spanish acronym is SEPANCINE or "Know Film") and the Autonomous Metropolitan University at Cuajimalpa mounted a large congress just before the festival, while a further scholarly round table studied films of the Mexican Revolution, whose centennial is just around the corner. Add to this a longstanding and invaluable forum for Mexican indigenous or "First Nation" filmmaking and you have a rich and strong brew.

Nonetheless, tensions ran high at the lavish opening ceremony, sponsored by *InStyle* magazine. As *telenovela* starlets twirled for the TV cameras on the red carpet outside, Tarantino, presenting his latest feature, roared to the auditorium audience, "Are you ready for some *bastardos*?" The ecstatic response suggested they were. Even the dignified Romanian ambassador, whose country was honored as the first "invited nation" at the festival, was caught up in the excitement, confessing on stage that she felt like a movie star. But beyond celebrity there was serious business here. It was the governor of Michoacán who recalled the unprecedented terror attack on the city by drug cartels just one year ago, a trauma from which (he said) the film community had helped Morelia to recover. And a speech by Consuelo Sáizar, the feisty director of CONACULTA (the National Council for Culture and Arts), proved surprisingly controversial. Catcalls greeted her claim that the current, right-wing federal government respected the film profession and considered cinema to be the most important medium for making Mexico a world cultural power. Facing down a hostile audience, she claimed that the budget for IMCINE, the national film institute, had recently been doubled and that production had increased. In spite of the economic crisis (which has hit Mexico harder than most, dependent as it remains on remittances from the U.S.), she promised that next year would see no cuts in the level of public subsidy or in the number of features produced per year, which she gave as seventy. This is clearly a matter of national pride, as the *annus mirabilis* of 2010 will mark not only the centennial of the Revolution but also the bicentennial of Independence.

Skeptical film folk questioned the minister's statistics and pledge on production, arguing that the problem is rather distribution, which remains dominated by U.S. companies and product. A case in point is the fate of the excellent winner of best documentary last year at Morelia. Eugenio Polgovsky's *The Inheritors* (*Los herederos*), which treats child labor in the

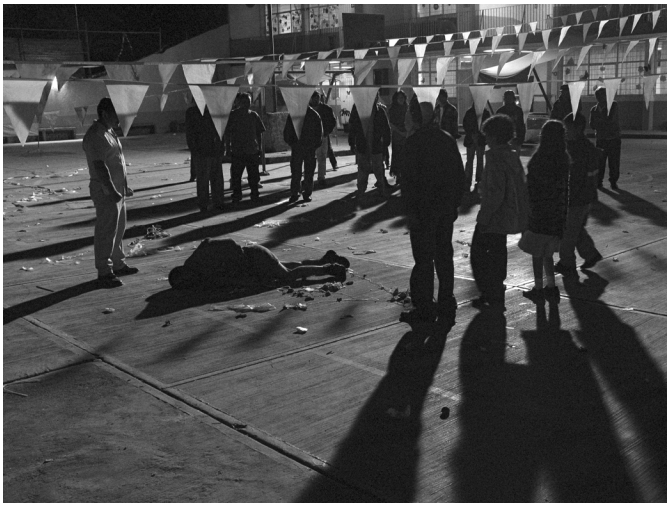
*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3, pps 18–22, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.63.3.18

Erotic mythmaking
*Enraged Sun, Enraged Sky.* Courtesy of Julián Hernández.

Mexican countryside, achieved the rare privilege of theatrical distribution in Mexico City where it was playing during the course of the current festival. In spite of its unprecedented success at the box office, however, by the second week major exhibitor Cinemex had scheduled it only for 11 a.m. screenings, reserving better slots for U.S. imports. Ironically also the recent and welcome upgrading of Mexico's once derelict theaters, by chains such as Cinépolis and Cinemex once more, has transformed moviegoing into a mainly middle-class activity: the price of a single ticket now outstrips the minimum wage.

But whether you are bullish about Mexican cinema's prospects like its government paymasters at CONACULTA and IMCINE or bearish like the perennially pessimistic industry, there remains little doubt that Morelia, with its unusual emphasis on debut filmmakers, serves (as one of its organizers claimed) as a kind of "crystal ball," predicting the future of Mexico's cinema. And if we take this year's Morelia selection as a litmus test for current filmmaking it is striking that favored genres range so widely: from the purely commercial (such as Miguel Necoechea's *Kid* [*Chamaco*], a proficient boxing movie that tells a familiar tale of triumph over adversity) to the resolutely arthouse (Matías Meyer's *The Cramp* [*El calambre*], an austere parable about a morose Frenchman taught life lessons by a Caribbean fisherman). One player is, however, especially influential: Mantarraya (Stingray), which last year celebrated its tenth anniversary at Morelia, is a production and distribution company devoted to a new generation of Mexican filmmakers. It is associated with controversial auteur Carlos Reygadas (*Japón*, *Battle in Heaven*, *Silent Light*), who now has a cluster of young protégés working alongside him. As we shall see, this year once more Mantarraya became one of the success stories of the festival.

As different as the Mexican features shown at the festival were, they displayed three recurring themes or leitmotifs that crossed the boundaries between genres, including the dividing line between fiction and documentary. The first is the murderous legacy of the past, including machismo, small-town repression, and perennially corrupt powers-that-be, such as politicians and the police. The second is present-day anxiety, caused by the inescapable presence of the U.S. border and the pervasive fear of insecurity, revealed in violent crime such as drug trafficking and kidnapping. And the third



The city and the desert
*Vaho* (top) and *Norteado*. Courtesy of Morelia International Film Festival.

is the retreat from Mexico's contemporary urban reality into an Edenic ruralism, where the twin territories of the sea and desert offer respite, however circumscribed and problematic, from the megalopolis of Mexico City, which now boasts some twenty-two million inhabitants. A fantasized rural past and a stylized urban present come together in the boldest film of the festival, Julián Hernández's three-hour homoerotic epic *Enraged Sun, Enraged Sky* (*Rabioso sol, rabioso cielo*), which I discuss at the end of this piece.

First, then, the wounds of the past. Jaime Ruiz Ibáñez's *Half of the World* (*La mitad del mundo*) traces the sexual awakening of a young man with special needs who lives with his overprotective mother in a small town in rural Mexico. Developing as a sex comedy (the young man is eagerly seduced by frustrated local wives who in one scene feast off his naked body), it stages a daring tonal shift in its final act. Accused of rape, the vulnerable protagonist is hunted down by the corrupt mayor and denied protection by the local priest. Alejandro Geber Bicecci's *Becloud* (*Vaho*, which received Special Mention from the jury) is very different in genre and ambitions. An example of the now familiar multinarrative strand of Mexican filmmaking, influenced by the prizewinning collaborations of director Alejandro González Iñárritu and Guillermo Arriaga (*Amores Perros*, *21 Grams*, *Babel*), Vaho flashes back and forward in time, cutting between the linked stories of three youths in Iztapalapa, an impoverished and drought-ridden borough of Mexico City. The extravagant visuals and operatic mood climax with a lengthy sequence shot on the streets at Iztapalapa's annual and hugely popular Passion play. The Crucifixion of Christ here restages the innocent sacrifice of a victimized character within the film, a tragedy that has scarred the three boys' lives. It is telling that *Half of the World* and *Becloud*, which could hardly be more different in register or scale, both end with a lynching, that most primal act of savage violence.

If Mexico's bloody past is inescapable, then its difficult present is also unavoidable. The U.S. border, evoking an uneasy mix of mortal danger and seductive promise, quite literally looms large in Rigoberto Perezcano's accomplished *Northless* (*Norteado*), which offers frequent telling shots of the fortified fence between the two nations, marching defiantly across the barren desert landscape or dwarfing the modest Mexican houses on its southern side. Like *Half of the World*, *Northless* stages an unexpected tonal shift. The first fifteen minutes seem to fall well within the familiar aesthetic of austere festival favorites pioneered in Mexico by Reygadas. In lengthy takes with no music or dialogue we observe as protagonist Andrés, a migrant from southern Mexico, fails in his attempt to cross the border, betrayed by the guide whom he has paid to help him. There are frequent shots of his small pathetic figure lost in the vast landscape. Sent back to Tijuana, Andrés offers to help out in a small store. There, slowly and shyly, he becomes involved with two lonely, loveless women working there. What began, then, as observational pseudo-documentary evolves into a delicate and touching romance, with humorous touches. At the film's end Andrés makes a final attempt at the crossing, this time lovingly sewn into a sofa (sic) by his newfound friends. While the story remains open (the last shot is of the sofa on a truck stuck in endless lines of traffic), director Perezcano lends a generously human face to the ongoing tragedy of the border with his strikingly original approach to an often-told tale.

Michel Franco's *Daniel and Ana* (*Daniel y Ana*, shown out of competition) offers a much frostier take on a contemporary problem. The titular couple, teenage son and daughter of a wealthy bourgeois family, are kidnapped from their car. In extended and brutal takes reminiscent of Michael Haneke (*The White Ribbon* received its Mexican premiere at the festival), the pair are stripped, brutalized, and forced to

have sex with one another as they are videotaped. While the director insisted on the veracity of his tale (supposedly told to him by the psychotherapist to whom the real-life sister turned), his film develops as a chilly chamber piece as the brother (played in his debut by Dario Yazbek Bernal, half brother of Gael García Bernal) retreats into traumatized catatonia and, finally, spectacular aggression. While some viewers questioned the plausibility of the film's premise (the criminals' motive is not blackmail, but an illicit trade in the rare specialism of incest pornography), it remains the case that the film treats in its stylized and abstracted way the sadly widespread phenomenon of kidnapping, which affects not only the middle classes in Mexico and contributes to that sense of a generalized "insecurity" which is perhaps the country's most disturbing current characteristic.

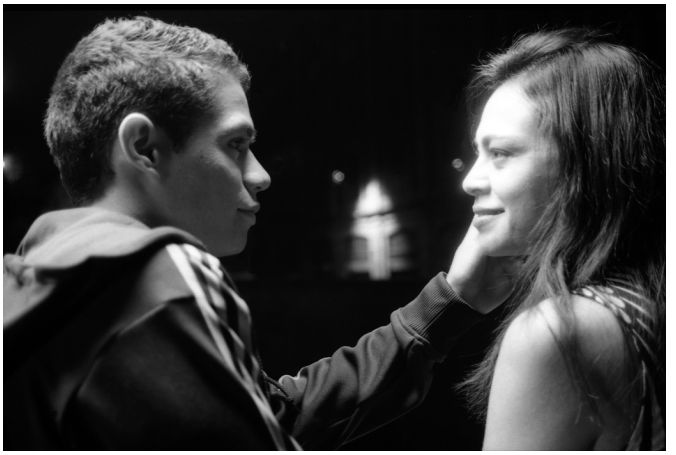
Still, some Mexicans have it worse than others. *Presumed Guilty* (*Presunto culpable*), the deserving winner of the feature documentary competition, tells the truly shocking tale of Toño, a young man picked up by the police in Mexico City for a murder he could not possibly have committed and locked up for two years in a hellhole of a prison. Jointly directed by Roberto Hernández, a lawyer now studying public policy at Berkeley, and Geoffrey Smith, a distinguished director for British television, the film is shamelessly exciting. Borrowing from the best U.S. crime series, it is dynamically shot and cut and finds in its subject a compellingly attractive protagonist: Toño even recorded a rap song and video (included in the film) about his case. Granted unprecedented access to the Mexican inquisitorial justice system, so different to the Anglo-Saxon adversarial mode, *Presumed Guilty* includes jaw-dropping footage of an Alice-in-Wonderland world in which the defense lawyer is forbidden by the judge to ask whether the arresting officers recognize the defendant, and where the smirking prosecutor refuses even to speak at the retrial, claiming she will just provide the judge with a disk with her argument on it. The brave hero of the film, who, now finally released, must surely fear reprisals from the same authorities he has so publicly humiliated, received a Tarantino-size welcome at the screening I attended. Later a large general audience of Mexican families, including many children, sat mesmerized at a public showing in the cathedral plaza. The film's producers (who include Martha Sosa of *Amores Perros*) hope to use *Presumed Guilty* as a tool in the current campaign to make the presence of cameras standard in Mexican criminal trials.

Given such urban narratives, small wonder, then, that a trip out of the city to the wilderness, whether sea or desert, might prove appealing. And the winner of both the Best Feature competition and the Audience Prize, Pedro González

Wilderness and ritual
*Alamar* (top) and *Flowers of the Desert*. Photos: www.mantarraya.com.

Rubio's *Alamar* (literally: *Tothesea*), a Mantarraya production, charts an endearing and deceptively simple voyage into the ocean. Playing themselves are Jorge, a charismatic Caribbean fisherman with a strong resemblance to Johnny Depp in pirate mode, and Natan, the impossibly photogenic blond child Jorge has fathered with the Italian mother from whom he is now separated. Gently but firmly Jorge initiates his young son, just arrived from urban Italy, into the rich mysteries of Mexican nature: recognizing flora and fauna, fishing with a line or a snorkel, living in a small shack built on fragile poles sunk in the sea. A garrulous grandfather serves as a humorous counterpoint to the romantically reserved father, while a glamorous white crane (christened "Blanquita") also drops in for a self-assured cameo. At one memorable point crocodiles lurk in the water just feet away from where the child plays happily on the shore.

González Rubio, who also served as director of photography in *Alamar*'s two-man crew, might appear at first sight to be making an observational documentary. But his nonprofessional actors are indeed acting, as their real personal circumstances are quite different to those shown in the film: the father and mother have not split up, the "grandfather" is unrelated to the principals, the floating house (devoid of women) serves in reality only as a temporary home for the fishermen who are habitually based on shore with their



Goddess descended
*Enraged Sun, Enraged Sky.* Courtesy of Julián Hernández.

families. And fictional elements are combined with exquisite filmic craftwork. Glorious wide shots of the ocean shining in the sunset or dappled by a sudden rainstorm are combined with extreme close-ups, carefully chosen, of, say, the father's and son's feet inching perilously down a rough tree trunk. And, a deliberate world away from stereotypes of Mexican machismo, the film focuses movingly on masculine tenderness and nurturing.

Called "Nanook of the South" by the local press for its apparent ethnographic focus, *Alamar* has something in common with José Álvarez's *Flowers in the Desert* (*Flores en el desierto*), which was also produced by Mantarraya and photographed by González Rubio. *Flowers in the Desert*, which won the Special Mention in the Best Documentary section, takes place wholly among the Huicholes, a large indigenous nation spread over several modern Mexican states. Flagrantly picturesque in their embroidered costumes and feathered hats, they are shown undertaking traditional pilgrimages to three sacred sites: the woods where they hunt deer, the coast where they sacrifice cattle to a sea deity, and the desert where they seek out and consume formidable quantities of peyote. Although the subjects sporadically comment on the process of filmmaking, in an indigenous language with which they no doubt assume the crew to be unfamiliar (the whole film is subtitled), and occasionally pick up the camera themselves, Flores is rigorously observational in technique: the crew refuse to question their subjects, much less intervene in their world, circumscribed as it is by millennial and apparently unquestionable tradition. This leaves many questions unanswered. Indeed one incident serves as a black hole, menacing the whole movie: one of the young wives (the Huicholes are polygamous) is taken to the sea to be "purified." Later we learn that she has hanged herself from a tree. Celebrating uncritically as it does the indigenes' supposed communion with nature, the film is unable to critique those aspects of their culture (such as machismo) that might prove more disturbing, much less to examine the place of such traditions within a rapidly modernizing Mexico.

It takes a filmmaker as daring and original as Julián Hernández to bring together these two alien worlds of sublime pre-Columbian mythmaking and all too real gritty urbanism. After *Enraged Sun*, *Enraged Sky* was shown in Morelia at its full 191 minutes length, I attended its theatrical premiere on October 12 at Cinépolis Diana on Reforma, Mexico City's most glamorous avenue, in a version shorn of an hour of footage. Hernández's third feature, and already the winner of the Teddy Prize in Berlin, it begins with a dazzling evocation of the city. Shot in luscious black-and-white, a "goddess" returns to the graffiti-scarred megalopolis, seeking true lovers who (according to the synopsis) will transcend the limits of space and time. The exotically named Kieri and Ryo will traverse many and varied gay cruising locations (most spectacularly the dilapidated porno theatre of the Cine Tacuba) in a wordless, but urgent, desire-fueled quest. Driven quite literally by *nostalgie de la boue* (at one point an unfortunate actor drags himself through what seems to be an urban bog), Hernández takes care to compose a glorious sound collage that matches his meticulously grungy mise-en-scène. Deprived almost entirely of dialogue (with the characters' motives and actions left uncommonly obscure), still we are given at points a cacophony of urban voices, an acoustic counterpoint to the infinite flow of people and places in the city.

Sadly, the excised hour contains the main body of the film's other strand: a mythic narrative of (once more) amorous pursuit among mainly naked youths, but this time shot in bleached-out color and in the spectacular rural locations of desert plains, caves, and pre-Columbian archeological sites. Hernández's erotic mythmaking may not prove to be the taste of every art-movie fan. But it remains the case that, on the basis of this year's Morelia Festival, a national cinema that in a single year can produce three such varied and distinguished films as *Alamar*, *Presumed Guilty*, and *Enraged Sun*, *Enraged Sky* would seem to be in unusually good health.

My thanks to Daniela Michel, General and Artistic Director of the Morelia International Film Festival, James Ramey, Academic and Strategic Consultant, and Montserrat Guiu, Jury Services.

PAUL JULIAN SMITH is the Professor of Spanish in the University of Cambridge.

ABSTRACT A report from the 2009 Morelia Film Festival, in the Mexican state of Michoacán. Three themes recurred in the films screened: the murderous legacy of the past, present-day anxiety, and pastoralism—which converge in Julián Hernández's outstanding *Enraged Sun, Enraged Sky.*

KEYWORDS Morelia Film Festival, Mexican cinema, Mantarraya, *Enraged Sun, Enraged Sky*, Julián Hernández

# ONCE GRAZING, NOW GONE: *SWEETGRASS*

## MEGAN RATNER DISCUSSES WHAT MAKES A MINIMALIST FILM ABOUT SHEEPHERDING SO POWERFUL

For nearly ten seconds, wind howls over a black screen. Mildly unsettling, the spare opening sets the tone for *Sweetgrass*, a lyrical documentary about modern-day sheepherders in the American West. Preceding the actual title, the film cuts to a beauty shot of the Rocky Mountains' Boulder Valley—the rusted-out carcass of a 1930s sedan in deep snow; a silver caravan of slightly newer vintage; and finally a group of muttering, bulky-fleeced sheep. As the bellwether stares quizzically into the camera, he seems to manifest John Berger's statement in his 1977 essay, "Why Look at Animals?", collected in *About Looking* (Vintage, 1992), that "the animal has secrets which, unlike the secrets of caves, mountains, seas, are specifically addressed to man" (5). Berger goes on to note that modern life has not only sidelined animals, but the "middle and small peasant" who have "remained familiar with animals and maintained the wisdom which accompanies that familiarity," their wisdom based on an "acceptance of the dualism at the very origin of the relation between man and animal" (28). Today's cowboys and sheepherders are the cousins of this peasant class, anachronistically skilled workers whose identities are further complicated by the popular confusion of their lives with the John Wayne/Marlboro Man archetype.

With no narration, no interviews, and more animal noise than human, *Sweetgrass* chronicles the preparation and herding of 3000 sheep from Big Timber, Montana to the Absaroka-Beartooth mountain pastures (some 150 miles). Using long takes and an inventive approach to sound, filmmakers Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor contrast the callusing realities of modern-day cowboys with the idealized (and largely movie-made) myths of the West. Like their previous films—*Made in U.S.A.* (1990), about sweatshops and child labor in the Los Angeles garment industry, and *In and Out of Africa* (1992), a video about the transnational African art market—*Sweetgrass* draws on their ethnographic training to detail a way of life and a process of work. (The couple is based at Harvard: Barbash is associate curator of visual anthropology at the Peabody Museum and Castaing-Taylor directs the Sensory Ethnography Lab.) But in this film, the sheep take center stage, not just watched but watching back. Caught in surprisingly stately close-ups, they seem mysterious. Barbash and Castaing-Taylor describe *Sweetgrass* as an attempt to "express both the allure and ambivalence of the pastoral—not the fantasy of the pastoral as promulgated by poets and outsiders, but as it's experienced by those whose lot in life it is to live it."[†]

The film begins in the early spring, as the flock is moved into the barn to be shorn of their winter coats. In the metronomic, calm shearing, the penned sheep are yanked up one-by-one, subdued by no more than the grip of the ranch hand's legs, the only sound the shrill electronic shears. Released afterwards into falling snow, the animals look delicate and vulnerable. Extended takes allow the viewer to absorb the scene in its totality, with people characterized by their actions rather than their speech. Next comes the lambing, the urgent need to maximize lamb survival conveyed by a certain brutality when, for example, orphaned or rejected newborns, many still bloody, are tossed into the pens of adoptive ewes. The ranch hands talk more to the sheep than each other, the men's apparent roughness belied by careful coddling and bottle-feeding of those youngsters denied a teat.

Eventually, the sheep drive through the town of Big Timber begins, the sheep swarming in all directions (and the camera often in their midst), the herders and ranch hands on foot and on horseback. The scene, like later images of the flock grazing in the high country, is in some ways difficult to credit to the present. One of the ranch hands remarks that just such scenes appear in the Bible. The filmmakers show people "long enough to allow the viewer to distinguish them

*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3, pps 23–27, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.63.3.23

Out of time
*Sweetgrass*. Courtesy of The Cinema Guild.

as individuals" without any further identification, the emphasis largely on the sheep, with camera angles meant to "evoke the experiences of the sheep, of what it was like to inhabit their bodies, rather than to stare at them as objective bodies/animals." Bleats, barks, neighs, and assorted human vernacular and ululating compete with hoofbeats, rain, and the constant wind. The herding depends on the spotty communication between humans and animals; on the shorthand of walkie-talkie and cellphone; as much on observation as intuition. Throughout *Sweetgrass*, several tableaux of the flock mimic human crowd shots, with a few ovine faces staring straight into the camera.

The chaos of getting the herd to the foothills involves herders of all ages, including a somber youngster, her tiny body dwarfed by the flanks of the quarter horse she deftly guides as she worries about all the other animals she needs to tend back home. In the firelit camp, tarpaulin tents slung between trees offer bracing shelter. Finally, only two herders remain: John Ahern and Pat Connolly. Over the next few weeks, they will shoulder full responsibility for protecting the herd from bear, wolverine, or, more frequently, simply wandering off in the wrong direction.

To term the camerawork handheld is somewhat of a misnomer. Castaing-Taylor wore a shoulder harness "from dawn to dusk," merging himself with the camera so completely that he ate and sometimes dozed with it. Much filming was done on foot, sometimes on horseback, and sometimes low to the ground, tracking the sheep at their level. The effect is dignifying, exploratory without being exploitative. The filmmakers "wanted to bear witness to people (and animals) actually living their lives." Even when he was alone with Ahern and Connolly, Castaing-Taylor posed no questions, nor asked for them (or anyone else) to repeat any action. Though Castaing-Taylor made an effort to mitigate the camera's effect, using it as "almost a prosthetic extension of his body rather than an instrument meant to shoot," he never denied its presence. But he also became in effect an apprentice hired hand and the hardship to which he subjected himself fostered an intimacy with the *Sweetgrass* subjects, human and animal. The filmmakers deliberately avoided the "ex post facto reports"

common to most documentaries, which often result in a "highly attenuated, and often affected and dissimulating, kind of representation, and a very impoverished record of the present." The camerawork shadows the subjects, more concerned with getting the feel for what the cowboys are doing than for clarifying everything for the viewer. *Sweetgrass* leaves much unexplained; yet though you feel slightly out of your depth, there is never a sense of confusion. It's an approach that honors the skilled work on display.

## UNSETTLING SOUNDS

There are few close-ups of the humans. The filmmakers see this as "freeing the viewer" from the limits of identification because it "forces the viewer to accept the trajectory of the journey, the landscape, without riding on any character's back." This emphasis on the collective over the individual loosens up the film and makes it gently abstract. Giving equal weight to people and animals was a way to "subjectify" the animals, both to anthropomorphize them and to "animalize or bestialize the humans" in this harsh environment. The accretion of detail encourages full attention to the unforgiving terrain, of paths that are rarely anything but rocky, slippery, and steep.

A good deal of the compelling effect is accomplished with sound, which plays as important a part in *Sweetgrass* as the images. Eager to capture "much of non-verbal yet aural" interaction between humans and animals, Barbash and Castaing-Taylor "spent more on sound than on the camera." Using the most powerful lavaliers permitted under U.S. law, they were able to record multiple sound signals from various points in a three-mile diameter. To convey the complications of an apparently simple passage of sheep from pen to pasture, Castaing-Taylor sometimes miked as many as eight animals and/or people. Four were recorded in sync, though Castaing-Taylor's headphones accommodated only two signals at a time. "He was constantly switching which sources he was monitoring, and deciding which ones were the most interesting to record, and unplugging and plugging accordingly." As it does in the wilderness, the film's sound occasionally disorients you, revealing the iconic scenery of the West as something stranger than it is usually presented in cinema and on TV. For much of the film, there's a feeling of not knowing where you are; viewers' active engagement is thus enlisted. Barbash and Castaing-Taylor set out to "establish a dialogue *with* an audience without having to do it *for* them."

Recognizable language, often removed from "communicative rationality," does little to explain matters. The burden is on the viewer to figure out what's going on: "Everyday cognition consists rather of multi-stranded fragments of sensation, imagery, language, and memory, all jostled together messily. We sought to reflect this in the film's aesthetic and sound–image relationship." In *Sweetgrass*, speech is vernacular, sometimes even incomprehensible. The filmmakers mix sound from one point with an image from another, creating surprising juxtapositions. Without any explanation, this web of voices, perpetually accompanied by animal sounds, conveys the complex, nonlinear work that each aspect of sheep-tending involves.

The first human sound in the film is "Kumbaday," the image a long take of a ranch hand coaxing a sheep into a yard at dusk. Though the locals attribute "Kumbaday" either to handed-down Norwegian from the homesteaders, or to the Irish "Come Paddy," the filmmakers discovered neither was right. Instead, it derives from Tudor duck-keepers' "Coombiddee," a contraction of "Come, I bid thee!" As used in the film, "Kumbaday" has no obvious referent, the filmmaker's way of avoiding the "discursive clarity (and self-objectification) to which documentary typically tends." In some ways, viewer confusion mirrors that of the sheep: only in the next shot does it become clear that the animals are being gathered for shearing.

A bit later, in the longest shot of the film, a woman rancher traverses the dimly lit nighttime lambing shed. Calmly, patiently she lures a reluctant ewe to follow its lamb into a jug. Gently tugging the bleating newborn by one leg, the woman draws the ewe's attention by mimicking the lamb's insistent bleat. "Of course," according to the filmmakers, "mimesis is at the heart of both language and intersubjectivity, but the mimicking of the lamb sound is hardly 'language' in the sense usually intended by the term." Though the shot is wide, the effect is intimate in the way the close-ups of the sheep are: a world to which you are offered a small glimpse, more startling for its inaccessibility. Barbash and Castaing-Taylor considered adding explicatory subtitles, choosing to risk that "perhaps being pulled in to muddle about for oneself allows for greater understanding than any verbal outline from anyone else." Admittedly, this amounts to a "political statement of a kind," which "places the onus for understanding more on the outsider than on the insider." Like the "Kumbaday" sequence, the lack of recognizable language allows the viewer to imagine the experience of the lamb and ewe.

Barbash and Castaing-Taylor were "wary of the picturesque" yet eager to develop an "aesthetic tension" between the visual and acoustical perspectives. The recording process which enabled this clash was developed on the fly. Castaing-

The last cowboys
*Sweetgrass*. Photos: sweetgrassthemovie.com

Taylor noted the "frequent lack of correspondence (and hence suspension of realism/naturalism)" between what he saw through the camera and heard on his headphones. The "synchronicities struck him as utterly surreal in their incongruities" and led to a further refining, with the collaboration of Ernst Karel, in the sound mix and edit. Yet the acoustics never become effects, never take you out of the film. Barbash and Castaing-Taylor include a snatch of Iraq War radio news, "one of the few ways within the diegesis of *Sweetgrass* that the global (national and international politics) is referenced in the (hyper)local." They were keen to place the action chronologically, to avoid a tendency of documentary films to make "their subjects seem timeless, as if they are forever caught in the moment in which they are filmed. We try to play with the tension between the general and the specific moment, as well as between the indexical and the particular, and the mythic."

This establishment of an aural presence is effected also by allowing us to overhear John Ahern, for example, singing to the sheep. (It's an especially good example of the filmmakers' efforts to "crack the veneer of the austere, ever resilient cowboy.") When paired with a distant wide shot of the unpredictable flock descending the mountain, Ahern's lilting cajoling to the "girls" seems remarkably intimate. Although both he and Pat Connolly do nothing to dispel the laconic cowboy stereotype, both men are surprisingly uninhibited about talking to themselves while miked. In such demanding working conditions, conversation, even over a meal, never much strays from the sheep. When talking to each other, Ahern and Connolly make little eye contact and don't even seem to hear each other, yet they "express a whole plethora of emotions" while talking to the animals.

As a counterpoint to the earlier ewe-and-lamb-coaxing, a later scene shows a nearly whimpering Connolly venting to his mother, the camera alternating between a staggering panorama, the kind Montana is sold on, and his relatively small figure, awkwardly perched on a hillock for better cell-phone reception: "It's so goddam rough that you kill a horse. This is bullshit. I don't get to bed until eleven, then I'm up at five. I can't sleep during the day—you don't daaaaare. It never quits blowin'. I'd rather enjoy these mountains than hate 'em.

And it's getting to that point I'm just hatin'." Connolly says a few words, more to himself than camera, about the phone reception, but softens up unexpectedly at the sight of his dog. It's one of the few scenes that feel utterly contemporary: not only does it involve a cellphone, but Connolly talks about his feelings. For a moment he seems less opaque.

## DECONSTRUCTING THE WESTERN

In what is arguably the most beautiful shot in a film full of stunners, snow dusts the freshly shorn sheep, rendering them spectral, almost transparent. The image has overtones of Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot and John Constable, though the filmmakers did not set out to echo those painters specifically. A sense of melancholy and loss is the main connecting thread: Corot and Constable painted pastoral scenes at the height of the industrial revolution, *Sweetgrass* documents a way of life—and the interdependence of man and animal—that the twentieth century put to an end in the U.S. As Barbash and Castaing-Taylor note: "it's de rigueur in anthropology to talk about novel forms of syncretic cultural difference, and emergence, but it was also important for us to signify loss, and ending . . . mourning." Though the film deals with the obsolescence of authentic cowboying, it also invokes the cinematic imagery that built the myth of the American West as a coherent whole.

Perhaps the seminal genre of U.S. cinema, the Western's potted history and comforting conventions inform a great deal of life in America; it enabled, for example, the careers of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. Though the West certainly figured in early U.S. history, the confluence of motion pictures (features as well as travelogues), the car, and, in more or less the same early twentieth-century years, the creation of the national parks ("America's best idea," in Ken Burns's boosterish formulation) all contributed to what environmental historian Alfred Runte in *National Parks: The American Experience* (University of Nebraska Press, 1979) terms a "scenic nationalism." The car facilitated mass tourism, the injunction to "see America first" by means of the automobile. In America, cars soon meant fun and the West became the nation's playground, marketed, as Jennifer Lynn Peterson notes in *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel* (ed. Jeffrey Ruoff, Duke University Press, 2006), not as the "space of western landscape but the space of cinema itself" (96). To this day, fueled in part by movie fantasies, many well-heeled, so-called neo-homesteaders willingly pay top dollar for a perceived authenticity, contrived nostalgia, and a killer view.

Barbash and Castaing-Taylor compare *Sweetgrass* to Westerns because the genre captures "a certain reality" and

Between myth and nature
*Sweetgrass*. Courtesy of The Cinema Guild.

"because contemporary working cowboys have internalized many of the cultural and psychological diacritics of cowboy culture, without being self-conscious about their objectification." Sometimes, as when he rides across a ridge at dusk, John Ahern seems straight from central casting; likewise the showdown-ready Main Street in Big Timber or even the bursts of white gunfire as Connolly shoots at a bear in the middle of the night. But the resemblances are on the surface only; Westerns feed off a nostalgia that *Sweetgrass* negates. Reversing the traditional arc of a Western from lawlessness to order, *Sweetgrass* devolves from structure into fragmentation. The final scenes point up the uncertainty and transience that are the hallmarks of an occupation which is itself dying out.

The film ends with a conversation between John Ahern and another ranch hand in the cab of a pickup truck, the summer pasturing over. Questioned about what's next, Ahern is vague. Away from the trail he's just another American between jobs, the drive recorded here the last before the Absaroka trail was closed down. The final note is one of anxiety, set against a landscape inextricably bound up with power and with American identity itself.

[1] Quotations from Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor are from a lengthy email interview I conducted with them, November 2009.

MEGAN RATNER wrote about *Paranoid Park* in the fall 2008 issue and *Gomorrah* in summer 2009.

ABSTRACT Incorporating interview material with filmmakers Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor, this essay discusses the sheepherding documentary *Sweetgrass*, especially its use of sound and its mournful deconstruction of the Western.

KEYWORDS Ilisa Barbash, Lucien Castaing-Taylor, sheepherding, nature film, sound

CREDITS *Sweetgrass*. Producer: Ilisa Barbash. Recordist: Lucien Castaing-Taylor. Sound editor: Ernst Karel. © 2009 Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor. U.S. distributor: The Cinema Guild.

# RESTORING *BROKEN EMBRACES*

## MARSHA KINDER ON CINEMA'S RESILIENCE, INTERTEXTUALITY, AND FATHER–SON RELATIONS IN "ALMODÓVAR'S *8½*"

Many reactions to Pedro Almodóvar's latest film, *Broken Embraces*, have been less than enthusiastic. Some critics claim it repeats what he has already done while others feel it lacks the comic exuberance of early films like *Labyrinth of Passions*, the subversive sexuality of transformational works like *Matador* and *Law of Desire*, and the emotional fire of mature masterpieces like *All About My Mother* and *Talk to Her*. While some of these complaints are justified, they don't acknowledge what this new film contributes: a masterful celebration of cinema's powers of resilience, at an historic moment when the medium has gone digital and its methods of distribution are being redefined.

In some ways, *Broken Embraces* is Almodóvar's *8½*. Fellini's reflexive film was recently evoked more explicitly by Rob Marshall's *Nine*, though the source of his adaptation was the derivative, theatrical musical rather than the original film. Thus, unlike *Broken Embraces*, *Nine* does not really focus on cinema. The simultaneous release of these films by Almodóvar and Marshall was noted in the November 2009 issue of *Vanity Fair*, which featured Penélope Cruz on the cover. But, instead of identifying their common source in Fellini, it emphasized both films' reliance on Cruz, who is used quite differently by the two filmmakers. In contrast to Marshall, who features an array of international stars to play the various women in the filmmaker's life (including Cruz as Guido's mistress Carla), Almodóvar follows Fellini's original vision for the symbolic muse played by Claudia Cardinale, making Cruz a composite of all female figures, not only in this film but in all of his experience. "Most of the female roles I've written in my life are a mixture of my mother and her neighbors in La Mancha, mixed with Golightly, [and] the Giulietta Masina of *La strada*," according to the director. "All those women are inside Penélope, so are their opposites, the 'grandes dames' of American film noir . . . Penélope can be any of them, and also Sofia Loren, Magnani and Claudia Cardinale."[1] With simple changes in costuming, Cruz evokes an array of dead movie stars, from Audrey Hepburn's ingénue to Marilyn Monroe's seductive platinum blond, reminding us that cinema brings ghosts back to life.

*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3, pps 28–34, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.63.3.28

### VISION AND RESTORATION

*Broken Embraces* asks whether a filmmaker can survive a loss of vision—the same question raised in *8½* where the loss was figurative—an aging auteur not knowing what to do next. Here the loss is literal.

*Broken Embraces* tells the story of writer–filmmaker Mateo Blanco (Lluís Homar), who is blinded in a car crash in Las Canarias that kills his beloved leading lady, Lena (Penélope Cruz). Though the film opens in Madrid in 2008, the accident occurs within a flashback to 1994. The film alternates between these two time zones, inhabited by two parent–child pairs: Ernesto Martel (José Luis Gómez), the tycoon Lena lived with, and his homosexual son Ernesto Jr. (Rubén Ochandiano); and Mateo's production manager Judit García (Blanca Portillo) and her son Diego (Tamar Novas). Both time zones contain inset fictions: Mateo's comedy *Girls and Suitcases*, starring Lena with Ernesto as producer; Ernesto Jr.'s making-of video documentary, commissioned by his jealous father to keep an eye on Lena; and a trendy vampire script Diego and Mateo are co-writing in 2008. All three are embedded within Almodóvar's nonlinear frame, which rivals the video in documenting the making of *Girls and Suitcases* and "the typical noir triangle" that emerges during the shoot. This framing narrative features countermoves by the rivals, both relying on the transformative powers of editing. In 1994, as an act of revenge for losing Lena, Ernesto remixes Mateo's film, purposely using the worst takes; in 2008, as an act of recovery, Mateo re-edits the film to restore his original vision.

Pedro Almodóvar confronts the small screen
*Broken Embraces*. Photo: Emilio Pereda and Paola Ardizzoni. Courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics.

## MATERIALITY AND MASTERY

*Broken Embraces* celebrates the material resources of the medium. The images behind the titles call our attention to lighting. We see a pair of "lighting doubles" who stand in for Hogar and Cruz. She appears at the end of the sequence, with an Audrey Hepburn hairdo that's just right for Mateo's inset comedy and a moody expression more fitting for Almodóvar's noir frame. Once inside the narrative, we see a tiny reflection of Mateo's face in a huge close-up of an eye, which belongs to a young blond who, after helping the blind filmmaker cross the street, has been invited home for casual sex. Like the pornographic prologue to *Law of Desire*, this erotic encounter is driven primarily by words (her description of herself). Yet it reveals more about Mateo: that he hasn't lost his virility or desire. Once Judit enters the apartment, the young blond leaves and (like *Law of Desire*'s young hustler) is never seen again. This double opening reminds us of the choices constantly demanded by cinema—of what we see, hear, and follow.

Almodóvar's crew helps him make these decisions. As Mateo's production manager Judit García, Almodóvar casts Blanca Portillo (neighbor to Cruz's character in *Volver*). Like some of the younger actors (Novas and Ochandiano), Portillo is best known in Spain for her roles in popular TV series. Yet, here she is identified with cinema, showing how the crew functions as family. Jealous of Mateo's passion for Lena, Judit helps Ernesto ruin Mateo's film; but as a loving single mother and a resourceful professional who makes the restoration possible, she is ultimately forgiven. Her name pays homage to Almodóvar's real-life producer Esther García, who has been working with him since 1985 and who has a brief cameo appearance where she helps Mateo find his way. As in most Almodóvar films, his brother and executive producer Agustín has a similar cameo moment.

When we hear Judit discussing a choice of locations (Alicante or Barcelona), we appreciate the choice of Lanzarote (an island in Las Canarias) as the ideal landscape for Mateo and Lena's retreat from Madrid. Its idyllic beaches provide

perfect settings not only for their affair, but also for the loving relationship emerging between Mateo (a sightless survivor recovering from the accident) and Diego (an asthmatic child seeing the ocean for the first time). Their brief visit to the beach produces a shared memory— of colorful windsurfing sails and barking dogs frolicking in the sand—a reaffirmation of life that strengthens their emotional bonding.

With its dramatic contrasts of volcanic black sand, burnished red rocks, and jade green pools, this landscape sets the color palette for the rest of the film. Almodóvar claims: "I'd never seen such dramatic colors in nature . . . Just as in my youth I'd been trapped by the technicolors of the Caribbean, my trip to Lanzarote first developed my fascination for black and the more somber semitones of red, green, brown and grey."

Even in Madrid the characters wear different shades of red, green, and coral and are situated in rooms decorated in these colors. Translucent, tropical-patterned drapes frame windows open to the city. Diego observes the similarity in such tropical mementos in the separate apartments of his mother and Mateo, which makes him realize they had once been lovers. This perceptive reading encourages us to distinguish between these floral designs and the solid red drapes that frame the dramatic window to the sea in Ernesto's house in Ibiza. The white sheets, in which his and Lena's tangled bodies are swathed, are equally revealing, for they evoke the anonymous mummified figures in Magritte's surrealistic series, *The Lovers*, similarly entombed in a dead relationship.

Rodrigo Prieto's camerawork is also distinctive, particularly in intimate shots framed against visually stunning backdrops: the two-shot of Lena and Ernesto set against the huge painting of peach-colored fruit, and the three-shot of Mateo, Judit, and Diego in a bar with night traffic moving behind them. Instead of cutting between characters in conversation, sometimes the camera moves back and forth between them. These moves are as blatant as those in Godard's *Contempt*, another reflexive film about cinema with similar themes. They remind us there is a real person behind the camera—pursuing his own desires. Lena also acknowledges the cameraman when she physically attacks Ernesto Jr.'s spying camera, and then violates cinematic conventions by using direct address to tell Ernesto she's leaving him.

Ernesto Jr.'s video calls our attention to sound. Like many amateur films (including Almodóvar's earliest works), the technical quality of its soundtrack is terrible, so his father hires a dubbing expert to lip-read the lines. In contrast, Mateo is a master of sound–image relations. Compensating for his blindness, he uses sound to select the best takes for the restored version of his film.

These material resources of cinema brilliantly coalesce in the collision at the crossroads, which is introduced by a stunning long shot of the car on a desolate horizontal road. The location is marked by a giant mobile sculpture, whose spinning globes and wheels, and eerie sounds and reflective surfaces, mirror the intricate structure of the narrative. These reflections augment Ernesto Jr.'s headlights, providing the additional lighting needed to capture the deadly crash. He follows the couple, with his camera mounted on the passenger's headrest in the front seat of his car, recording their final kiss as Mateo's car is broadsided by a black SUV, an anonymous engine of death. By seeing the collision again, we realize the lingering kiss in the roundabout was partly responsible. Although his father's possible involvement remains a mystery, the repetition reveals that Ernesto Jr. was innocent and helped save Mateo's life. We also witness his technical ingenuity in mobilizing digital technologies to preserve the final broken embrace.

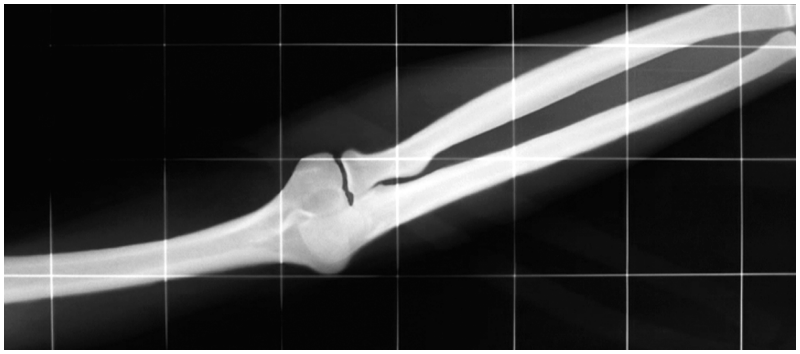
Although *Broken Embraces* pays homage to "the moviola . . . and to all the magnetic and photographic materials that new technology has swept from the editing rooms," Almodóvar acknowledges the power of digital imagery. Unlike the aging filmmaker in *8½*, he refuses "to be paralyzed by nostalgia": "I'm willing to embrace the new techniques, in the same way that Mateo embraces on the television the kiss that is so digitally enlarged that it looks totally broken on the screen. It is precisely the flickering of the pixelation that makes the image so forceful."

## EDITING AND INTERTEXTUALITY

Mateo insists he will never make sequels or remakes, yet freely reshuffles narrative elements from previous films. Intertextuality and remix are nothing new in Almodóvar movies, but no film uses them more powerfully, for here they are pivotal to the plot.

In one scene Mateo and Lena watch Rossellini's *Voyage to Italy* on television, the sequence where Ingrid Bergman and George Sanders examine tactile signs of the last embrace between dying lovers at Pompeii. Almodóvar makes the parallels explicit: "Lanzarote would be the island where Lena and Mateo hid, Famara their refuge, their Pompeii, and the roundabout their Vesuvius." Like the pixelation in Ernesto Jr.'s video image, this intertext expands the force field of their final kiss: it explains why Mateo tries to read it with his hands, as if it were printed in Braille or sculpted into Famara's volcanic sands.

In another scene, as if demonstrating his sensitivity to sound, Mateo suggests listening to Jeanne Moreau's voice in Malle's *Elevator to the Gallows*, a reference followed by a playlist of his favorite film classics: Sirk's *Magnificent Obsession*, Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander*, and *8½*. Other refer-



Lighting doubles and family pressures, painterly depictions of Lena and Ernesto,
Lena confronts her victimization, fracture and reflection

*Broken Embraces*. © 2009 El Deseo D.A. S.L.U. DVD: Pathé (France).

Backdrops and landscapes, grasping fragments and pixels, recapturing lightness and wit, the noir triangle redesigned

*Broken Embraces*. © 2009 El Deseo D.A. S.L.U. DVD: Pathé (France).

ences are evoked through pseudonyms: Mateo's nom de plume Harry Cain brings to mind *Citizen Kane*, another film told in flashbacks about a powerful tycoon obsessed with controlling the woman he loves. And, Ernesto Jr.'s pseudonym Ray X (chosen after his father's death) reminds Mateo of Powell's *Peeping Tom*.

There are several allusions to Buñuel's films. Although Lena, a nickname for Magdalena, suggests a redeemable whore, her choice of "Severine" for her work as a call girl evokes Buñuel's perverse prostitute in *Belle de Jour*. When Ernesto pushes Lena down a dramatic flight of stairs in a jealous rage, we think of Buñuel's insanely jealous husband and his equally dramatic staircase in *El*, which Almodóvar calls "the best film about the madness of jealousy." The casting of a wizened Angela Molina to play Lena's mother creates ironic connections with Buñuel's *That Obscure Object of Desire*. Unable to cope with her family's poverty or her husband's imminent death, she encourages Lena to sell herself to her wealthy boss so that he will take care of their financial woes. This dynamic evokes both the mother from *That Obscure Object of Desire* who does the same to her daughter Conchita (played by the voluptuous young Molina, alternating with Carole Bouquet), and Almodóvar's comic variation in *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, where the desperate housewife loans her precocious gay son to their lecherous dentist to defray their dental bills.

At one point we see thousands of fragments from torn photographs of Mateo and Lena embracing, forming a giant collage that fills the entire screen. Almodóvar calls it the film's "most expressive image," one that evokes not only the title *Broken Embraces* but also the film's underlying database structure. Diego selects a few fragments and begins reassembling them like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. This is the same process he and Mateo later follow in restoring the original version of *Girls and Suitcases*. It's also the process that each new film by Almodóvar demands of us spectators: rereading his entire body of work through each new remix, a process I call "retro-seriality."

## RETRO-SERIALITY AND REMIX

*Broken Embraces* is not the first Almodóvar film where a filmmaker suffers a devastating loss in a car crash. It also occurs in *Law of Desire*, where the filmmaker Pablo temporarily loses his memory instead of his vision—a loss potentially more devastating for an auteur. The comparison shows that the blind Mateo can continue as a writer only because he is sustained by vivid memories and intertexts.

With its intricate nonlinear structure, its dizzying doubles and pseudonyms, and its generic identification as noir, *Broken Embraces* is most reminiscent of Almodóvar's *Bad Education*. Not only do both films emphasize writing, but both have an important character (Lena or Ignacio), who is already dead when the film begins, and who is seen only in flashbacks and in the creative works of others. Yet the morality of these two films and their parallel characters couldn't be more different. Although both Gael García Bernal and Penélope Cruz evoke a diverse array of characters and bear a superficial resemblance in their platinum blond wigs, he is a murderous *femme fatale* and she an unfortunate victim. In most Almodóvar melodramas, even murderers, kidnappers, and rapists are sympathetic; it's only in noir that he presents this Manichean division between good and evil. This binary also applies to characters played by Lluís Homar: a murderous pedophile and corrupt publisher in *Bad Education*, but a loving father and dedicated auteur in *Broken Embraces*.

In contrast to *Bad Education* and *Law of Desire* which both focus on rivalries between blood brothers, *Broken Embraces* emphasizes fathers and sons. Although it contains several story fragments from the Oedipal myth—blindness, flashbacks, a son's desire to kill his father, a father's failure to recognize his son, a fatal meeting at the crossroads, the name Ray X (which sounds like Rex)—they are reshuffled to create a different story. For Mateo is a loving father to Diego, even without knowing their biological bond. Although their relationship is associated with writing (as in the films about brothers), here there is no rivalry. In their playful collaboration, Mateo insists Diego get top billing.

This ideal father–son bonding is contrasted with two dysfunctional relationships more consistent with the Oedipal master narrative, yet also connected to writing. Mateo wants to write a story about playwright Arthur Miller and his son with Down Syndrome, whom he never acknowledged—a relationship that evokes the one between Ivan and his unacknowledged son Carlos in *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*. Although Mateo claims the story is hopeful, since the son forgave his father, it is still sad both for the son and for Miller's ex-wife Marilyn Monroe, who never recovered emotionally after having lost their unborn child.

Even more toxic, the second Oedipal conflict involves the two Ernestos. As indicated by their names (and Almodóvar's press notes), it is based on the relationship between Ernest Hemingway and his son Gregory, who, after the death of his famous macho father, had a sex-change operation. In Almodóvar's version, young Ernesto is a closeted homosexual forced to imitate his controlling father, but he comes out after his father's death, showing how this relationship restrained him and how cinema helped him break free.

In *Broken Embraces*, the most explicit Almodóvar intertext is *Women on the Verge*, his first crossover success in the global market and the film being remixed in Mateo's *Girls and Suitcases*. Pina's laments about Ivan, her gazpacho spiked with sleeping pills, burned bed, discarded phone, and suitcase full of cocaine—these elements make the connection to *Women on the Verge* impossible to miss, but (like those from the Oedipal myth) they are reshuffled. The adaptation involves not only replacing Carmen Maura with Penélope Cruz but more complicated combinations: "Pina isn't an adaptation of [Pepa] the role played by Carmen Maura, but rather of the role of her model friend Candela."

By drawing on Almodóvar's entire canon, *Broken Embraces* seeks to prove his films can still appeal to the mass market, including youths like Diego in their "Sock it to Me" T-shirts (the song Almodóvar sang in *Labyrinth of Passions*). As with the vampire film Mateo is co-writing with Diego, Almodóvar shows he can even reach those who prefer television, digital video, and the Internet. Significantly, in *Broken Embraces*, we see no movie theaters; footage is displayed only on an array of small screens. The only theater mentioned is the one in the devastating *El País* review of Ernesto's 1994 version of *Girls and Suitcases*; the theatrical release of Mateo's 2008 remix remains in doubt. In the final scene, Mateo, Judit, and Diego sit together in front of a small screen, like a family watching television, enjoying the restored version of the movie. Representing the digital generation, Diego reassures Mateo that he laughed like crazy and can't wait to see what happens next!

## QUESTIONS AND RESERVATIONS

As in *8½*, Almodóvar's celebration of cinema leads him to remix many of his motifs from previous works, which explains why *Broken Embraces* feels so familiar. This celebration also guides his choice of intertexts, which seem to anticipate the other complaints. By repeating Carmen Machi's hilarious monologue on her sexual adventures with a drug dealer in the remix of *Women on the Verge*, Almodóvar seeks to recover the comic exuberance and "irrepressible, crude tone of *Patty Diphusa* from the early 80s." By opening *Broken Embraces* with a sexual encounter between strangers, he evokes the subversive sexuality of *Law of Desire*. And by including a loving mother–son relationship and the premature death of a vibrant young character, he strives for the emotional richness of *All About My Mother*. Yet *Broken Embraces* still lacks emotional fire—partly because (unlike *8½*) a great emotional distance exists between the filmmaker and his fictional counterpart, and because they both privilege the reflexive tribute to cinema over the romance.

In the classic noir sequence where Ernesto pushes Lena (dressed in a blood red suit with matching spiked heels) down the staircase after she tells him she's leaving him for Mateo, we are more interested in the visuals than in the violence, partly because we already know how Lena dies. Mateo is less concerned about what bones are broken than with how this injury might sabotage *Girls and Suitcases*—how he will explain the sudden appearance of a cast on her leg, and how the battered Lena will play a scene that is "light" and "witty." Similar dynamics work with the green-tinted X-rays of Lena's limbs, following the fall. Their huge size makes them stunning visuals, like the still-life paintings of gigantic guns in Ernesto's home, expressing his hunger for power. These X-rays help explain why Ernesto Jr. chose the pseudonym Ray X: he may have trouble with sound, but his visual focus is as obsessive and penetrating as his father's and he has retained those paintings of guns as his legacy.

Although Almodóvar displays Cruz's sexuality in love scenes with Mateo, they never reach the intensity of her provocative dance in *Nine*. In *Broken Embraces*, what is far more memorable is the brilliant sequence where she experiences revulsion (both toward herself and Ernesto) after a weekend of marathon sex with the old man—a scene that seems emotionally connected to her earlier performances in *Volver* (where she plays the victim of father–daughter incest) and in *All About My Mother* and *Live Flesh* (where her engagement in subversive sex leads to her premature death). Perhaps this thematic shift is rooted in Almodóvar's identification of Cruz with his mother, or in his own emotional commitment to stories he now wants to tell. For, instead of celebrating the transformative powers of sexuality (as in earlier works), his last three films have explored its emotional costs for young victims. In *Broken Embraces* the resilient powers of cinema partially offset this noirish focus on victimization. Yet, like the final sequence in *8½*, Almodóvar's ending leaves us wondering, along with Diego, what happens next.

†All quotes by Almodóvar are from the Sony Pictures Classics press notes for *Broken Embraces*.

MARSHA KINDER is author of *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* (University of California Press, 1993).

ABSTRACT Reading *Broken Embraces* as Almodóvar's *8½*, this essay explores its celebration of cinema's resilience at an historic moment when the medium has gone digital and its distribution is being redefined. Almodóvar's remix of earlier films and genres shows how intertextuality generates plot.

KEYWORDS Almodóvar, cinema's resilience, intertextuality, color palette, father–son relations

CREDITS *Los abrazos rotos.* Director, writer: Pedro Almodóvar. Producers: Agustín Almodóvar, Esther García. Cinematographer: Rodrigo Prieto. Editor: José Salcedo. Music: Alberto Iglesias. © 2009 El Deseo D.A., S.L.U. U.S. distributor: Sony Pictures Classics.

# INDONESIA IN MOTION: AN INTERVIEW WITH LEONARD RETEL HELMRICH

## SCOTT MACDONALD TALKS TO AN INNOVATIVE DOCUMENTARY-MAKER WHOSE RECENT WORK DEALS WITH ISLAM'S IMPACT ON INDONESIA

Dutch–Indonesian filmmaker Leonard Retel Helmrich is an innovator, committed to the idea that cinema is movement. This has led him to develop new types of camera equipment in order to achieve particular forms of motion for particular films. With *Moving Objects* (1991), a study of Dutch experimental puppetry, Helmrich, like a puppeteer, began to treat the camera as an object to be manipulated and moved around in unfamiliar ways. (The director has also studied Tai Chi, which has influenced his sense of space and mobility.) For *Somebody on the Stairs* (generally known by its Dutch title of *Jemand auf der Treppe*, 1994), he directed his cinematographer (working with an early, heavy Phillips Digital Video camera hanging from the ceiling on a crane Helmrich designed) to record a sound-art performance by Peter Zegveld and Tijs van der Poll, not only in a single, continuous sixty-minute shot (antedating Andrei Sokurov's *Russian Ark* [2002] by eight years), but from *within* the performance itself: the camera moves through the performance space and around the performers the way a lightweight handheld camera might, but with more stability.

In recent years Helmrich has used an unusual form of "fly-on-the-wall" observational documentary shooting for the first two sections of what will be a trilogy about an Indonesian family, the Sjamsuddins, dealing with economic, political, and social upheaval: *The Eye of the Day* was completed in 2001, *The Shape of the Moon* in 2005. These two engaging, often visually stunning films reveal many facets of Indonesian culture, including the ways in which the country is being affected by the arrival of a new, fundamentalist brand of Islam. The impact of this fundamentalism is the primary focus of two other films, *Flight from Heaven* (2003), shot in an Islamic school for young men, and *Promised Paradise* (2004), which follows Indonesian performance artist Agus Nur Amal as he reflects on the aftermath of 9/11.

*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3, pps 35–41, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.63.3.35

Though he has continued to design his own equipment, Helmrich has benefited from the arrival of smaller digital cameras and the opportunities they afford for a more intimate relationship with his subjects. Helmrich has filmed the Sjamsuddins intensively since 1997 and, often operating it without looking through the viewfinder, he lets his noiseless digital camera run as long as possible without interruption so that the family forgets that filming is taking place. Helmrich calls this method "single-shot cinema" and the resulting films successfully take the viewer "inside" the family and their community, strengthening our sense of identification and understanding. These documentaries have a dramatic impact comparable to powerful fiction films.

Helmrich is currently on a Radcliffe Fellowship at Harvard University, editing *The Position of the Stars*, the final installment of the Indonesian trilogy. This interview was recorded in the fall of 2007 and in the spring of 2008, and refined online.

***Scott MacDonald*: How did you begin your trilogy?**

*Leonard Retel Helmrich*: When I finished *Jemand auf der Treppe*, my producer Hetty Naaijkens got me money to do research in Indonesia. In those days the Dutch Film Fund gave money to people interested in making films about their roots. During my research, I got arrested and put in jail, and then kicked out of Indonesia because I was filming a student demonstration from the inside. It took me two years to arrange to go back.

**How long were you in jail?**

Only four days—long enough for me [laughter]! Luckily my brother went to the Dutch Embassy in Jakarta and they helped to convince the Indonesian authorities to let me go.

I returned in 1998 just at the beginning of the economic crisis that resulted in [President] Suharto's stepping down. In the meanwhile the DV system had become available, and it appeared to be very good quality when blown up to 35mm. I remember *The Saltmen of Tibet* [*Die Salzmänner von Tibet*, 1997] by Ulrike Koch. She shot the film on 35mm, but when

Helmrich holding a camera mounted on the Steadywings device
Courtesy of Leonard Retel Helmrich.

she got to the border, they took her equipment and all her footage. She went back with a DV camera and shot the whole film over again; it was blown up to 35mm and became quite a hit in Europe. This made me realize that I could shoot on DV instead of celluloid. I went back to Indonesia with a DV camera.

**You seem quite intimate with the family you shoot in *The Eye of the Day*.**

My relationship with the Sjamsuddin family started quite a long time ago, during my research trip in 1995, when I visited my mother's native village. I'd always had contact with my Indonesian family through letters, but I didn't meet my aunts and cousins who live in that village until 1990, when my mother passed away. I also met my mother's friend Rumidja on that trip.

When I returned with the research subsidy in 1995, Rumidja was a good contact for me because she knew her way around Jakarta, and because she and Marwan, her late husband, still could speak a little Dutch—they had had to learn Dutch during the days of the Dutch occupation. Her son, Bachtiar, was very willing to assist me with anything I needed (in fact, his name means "helpful"). When I went back at the end of 1997, I got Bachtiar a driver's license so he could help me make a film about student demonstrations, and then when the demonstrations developed into the resistance that brought Suharto down, I realized that this family *itself*—I mean the whole infrastructure of the family and how these political events were affecting them—should be my focus. In time, they became a kind of second family for me: the little girl Tari [Theresia Utari] can't remember when I was not part of her world.

**How long did you shoot for *The Eye of the Day*?**

I started shooting in 1998 and finished in 2001. Sometimes I went back to Holland, but most of the time I was in Indonesia. Once I had accumulated a certain amount of material for *The Eye of the Day*, I began looking at what I had and, as a kind of self-psychoanalysis, worked to figure out what story I was trying to tell. It was only in 2001 that I felt that I had a good beginning, middle, and end. Later, when I made *The Shape of the Moon*, I already knew I was going to focus on certain aspects of the lives of this family. But when I was shooting *The Eye of the Day*, I didn't know this. I could see that things would be different before Suharto and after Suharto, but as events were developing, I didn't have a clear focus. Finally, during the editing, I realized: "Oh, yes, *this* is what I wanted to do!"

**One powerful image that becomes a motif in both *The Eye of the Day* and *The Shape of the Moon* is the distant city of Jakarta and the huge power lines running toward it. This seems a metaphor: the family you focus on lives underneath the lines, on the margins of the central city and the economic power concentrated there.**

Yes, though when I'm shooting, I'm usually not aware of the symbolic meanings I discover during the editing.

**How fully does the fact that you're filming modify what's going on in the family? When you arrive at the family's home, is your camera already running?**

No, not always. But since I carry it with me all the time and since I never hold the camera in the usual way and since the camera is quiet, I can be shooting without them knowing. They don't even realize I'm filming, when suddenly I lift up and orbit around them.

Yesterday a student asked me if my shooting ratio was 10: 1, 20: 1? I shot about 200 hours of material for *The Eye of the Day*, a ninety-minute film, so my ratio is a bit less than 100: 1. But that does not mean that all that I didn't use is rubbish. For example, I have enough material for a fantastic film about how people live in the huge Bantar Gebang garbage field, where there is a hierarchy among the ethnic groups. Only the Madurees are allowed to get the tin cans and the iron, the metals; then the Indamayu people, another ethnic group, are allowed to get the plastics; and then the children come and get the paper. It's an infrastructure like you can find in nature with insects and animals: first, the big ones come, then the smaller, all the way down to the bacteria; and everything gets used again in one way or another.

**The Indonesian politics in *The Eye of the Day* are unclear to me.**

The yellow party was the old party of Suharto, and the red party was one of the opposition groups. I didn't make the details clear partly because I wanted to suggest that in Indonesia, as in other developing countries, there always seems to

be a dictator doing a terrible job, and people trying to make a new infrastructure. I liked that the groups used bright yellow and bright red—it helps dramatize the situation—but there was another color and another party that I don't emphasize: green, for the Muslim party, which was getting more powerful in Indonesian society even before 9/11. Later on, I learned that when Suharto fell, lots of Arab Muslim missionaries came to Indonesia to preach a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam.

**In both films, you seem very aware of the impact of Islam on Indonesian society. Did making *Flight from Heaven* have a powerful impact on *The Shape of the Moon*? *Flight from Heaven* is interesting for Americans because it shows us the impact of 9/11 in a very different part of the world. I don't know if I would say it's an anti-Islamic film. In fact, in a way Islam has nothing to do with it: the issue is a certain way of using religion. But the film certainly seems hostile toward certain aspects of modern Islam as they are playing out in Indonesia.**

The people from VPRO television in the Netherlands asked me, "Can you make something for us in Indonesia?" And I remembered that the priest in the film, whom I met while shooting *The Eye of the Day*, had said, "If you want to shoot in my Muslim boarding school, please do. You can come here and film anytime." So I told the television people I could shoot in a Muslim boarding school and that I could show how moderate and open and spiritual Islam is in Indonesia. Indonesian Muslims are not for Osama bin Laden or terrorism. That was what I thought at that time.

When I agreed to make the film, I already knew a family in the neighborhood where I was living in Jakarta who were thinking of sending one of their boys, Johan, to a Muslim boarding school because he was always fighting with his brother. I told the parents that I knew of a Muslim boarding school that cost nothing. They said, "We want to send him there," and I decided Johan's experience might be my focus.

I was allowed to film at the boarding school, but only as long as I was doing the same things the other residents did: praying five times a day, reading the Qur'an . . . Sometimes I tried to avoid this rule by saying, "I have to shoot this because otherwise I don't have a film," and they were flexible.

I also remember that at one point Johan and I were talking about why we had to read the Qur'an in Arabic and not in Indonesian. I said, "You should ask your teacher." So I filmed him questioning his teacher. He was my "Watson"—the person who can ask questions so that things can be explained without narration.

**One of the characters talks about how the "war" between Islam and the infidels is not a military war, but a cultural war that is fought in movies. Ironic that you're making a movie of him making this statement!**

[Laughter] Since they knew that I wanted to make a positive film, they let me record this conversation. But the moment I learned that they had burned down the neighborhood cinema and that they were *proud* of that, I thought, "Wow, you're telling a *filmmaker* that you burned down a *cinema*?!" For me, that's the same thing as telling an imam that you burned down a mosque. And especially *that* cinema—the cinema where I'd always wanted to show *The Eye of the Day* to the people from the neighborhood. I had known that somebody had burned it down, but when I heard it was *them*, my attitude changed completely. I still want the boarding school brought to court for this.

**The change in your feeling about Islam seems evident in *The Shape of the Moon*. You have the Islamic call to prayers, then bats flying out of the bamboo pipes of a mosque, which seems a way of saying the Muslims in Indonesia are becoming evil, or at least creepy.**

Well, no. For me a bat is one of the most fantastic animals. It's a mammal, but its evolution is completely different from the evolution of all the other mammals. I like bats very much.

Also, Muslims believe that at Maghrib (sunset), that is, during the evening prayer and the last prayer of the day, all

A makeshift carriage powered by motorbike
Courtesy of Leonard Retel Helmrich.

Faith, performance, protest

*Flight from Heaven* (top). © 2003 VPRO. *Promised Paradise* (middle). © 2006 VPRO, Scarabeefilms, Coöperatie Scarabee u.a.
*The Shape of the Moon* (bottom). © 2004 Scarabee Films, Coöperatie Scarabee.

the bad spirits come out, so you can read the bats that way as well. It's true that someone could read this moment as evil coming from the mosques. But as I've often said, for me an image can mean this *and* that, just as in quantum physics, mass is understood as a wave *and* as particles.

It is also true that things are changing in Indonesia and in a direction that scares me. The problem is the indoctrination of the people not from above, not by the government, but from underneath, in the mosques—especially by fundamentalist Muslim missionaries. They don't start by saying all Christians are bad or that Indonesian culture is bad. But if they see that someone wants to present the shadow puppet performance called Wayang Kulit, an old and wonderful Indonesian tradition, they say, "Well, as a good Muslim, you'd better not watch this play." Even in little villages they approach the Lurah, the person who gives the permission for this performance, and say, "It will be better if you don't let them do this performance," and so many Lurahs don't give the permits anymore.

In the village where my mother was born, beautiful, traditional Javanese dances were taught to the young people every Friday evening, but now the Muslims say, "Those dances are too sexy; they shouldn't be permitted." So young people aren't being taught traditional dances. The Muslims want people to play the rebana, a drum tambourine (sometimes there are bells on it) that makes a kind of Islamic music,

and *only* that instrument. They don't accept traditional Javanese instruments. The richness of Indonesian culture is under attack.

**There seem to be two things evolving for you at the same time: in *The Shape of the Moon* you are developing the story of this family, focusing more and more on their struggles to survive. But, at the same time, during any period of your work, you're also experimenting with different ways of moving whatever camera you're working with. And this leads to your constantly designing pieces of equipment that will be necessary to make the kinds of camera movements you've decided can best represent particular moments or experiences. The hair-raising bridge sequence in *The Shape of the Moon* required its own piece of new equipment.**

I want to be sure that whatever is happening, I'm able to shoot within the three-dimensionality of real experience. I'm not always wanting to make machinery; actually, I try to do it as little as possible and as simply as possible. That's why one of the things that I always teach when I do workshops is how people can stand on top of each other's shoulders to create high-angle shots. I've never studied engineering, and so my devices are usually very simple.

Certain events can only be captured well with certain kinds of moving camera. For instance, look outside that window: you see the trees standing next to each other; they form a very nice perspective with the lampposts beyond. If you move horizontally, you have the feeling of three-dimensional space more than if you move vertically. I try to be constantly aware of how space works and how you can bring a particular space across to viewers.

Film is a technical medium in which the equipment is created by people who are usually not filmmakers, though the filmmakers feel forced to work with what the technicians design. When you as a filmmaker *know* what you want, you can think as a technician, but one who can make exactly what *you* need for *your* film.

When I was shooting *The Shape of the Moon*, I saw this high, narrow, one-track railroad bridge, and thought, "What a fantastic bridge!" Then I saw people walking across it, which seemed crazy. I talked to some of the people and they said I could film them walking on the bridge. We built a crane from the bamboo growing there: I wanted to use strings so that I could control the camera like a puppeteer. During the shooting, I was sitting on a little "dolly" that ran on the railroad track, which we rented from a nearby train station. The whole scene is shot from the dolly, using the crane, except for the moment where you see the man's feet walking: that was filmed by the man himself, wearing a helmet with a camera mounted on it. The helmet, designed by my co-cameraman Ismail Fahmi Lubish, could point down while the man looked forward so he could see where he was going and not fall off the bridge! [See www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0u7noFBK6M for a demonstration of how this sequence was made.]

I wanted the scene to be shot so that the viewers would feel the vertigo we felt; I had been thinking about how to create that sensation, up until I saw *Spider-Man* [2002, directed by Sam Raimi]. There are moments in that film when Spider-Man's movements are great, but when you as a viewer should actually be *feeling* vertigo, the film cuts away. I thought, they have the right movement to express this but they don't use it! I decided I'd do it the right way on the bridge. And I was right, my method works.

That scene is a reference to the Sirotolmustakim. According to Islam, in your life you're walking on a very narrow bridge and every decision you make is another step on that bridge, and only that bridge leads to Heaven. At the end of your life you will find out if you are still walking on that bridge. If not, you immediately fall into Hell.

**The bridge scene is part of a dream sequence, unusual in a documentary.**

For the dramas I record in my documentary films, I want to use the same expressive camera angles and other techniques as I would for fictional dramas I might write and produce. I work differently than a fiction filmmaker usually does, but both of us are condensing: the fiction filmmaker condenses events that might happen in reality into a script and then shoots according to the script. I record events as they happen in reality in continuous shots, without editing at all, and then after I've collected my footage, I analyze it and find the parts that will allow me to condense what I've shot into a dramatic experience.

**One thing that's clear in *The Eye of the Day* and *The Shape of the Moon* is that Bachtiar changes a great deal. He becomes a Muslim, and gets married, and seems to become much more adult with his mother.**

Before he converted, Bachtiar didn't go to church, even though he was baptized. Rumidja was more ashamed to have a son who was not religious at all, than to have him become a Muslim. Rumidja herself wasn't a Christian until she moved to the city and married a Christian.

**She mentions Allah when she's praying at her mother's grave.**

For her, as for many Indonesians, religion is all mixed up and it's all one. She's a Christian but she prays to Allah also. That's what I like about Indonesia.

**How did you decide to make *Promised Paradise*?**

It came very much out of my disappointment with *Flight from Heaven*, and my failure in that film to show the variety of Islam in Indonesia. I thought that by focusing on Agus Nur Amal, I could show that Indonesian culture is not one thing, and that many Indonesians are not for bin Laden and terrorism.

## AN ACROBATIC, ROVING CAMERA

*The Eye of the Day* (top four). © 2001 Scarabee Films, Coöperatie Scarabee. *The Shape of the Moon* (bottom). © 2004 Scarabee Films, Coöperatie Scarabee.

**You've known Agus Nur Amal for quite awhile?**

Yes. Agus was involved in my other films. If I'd say, "Where do I have to go to if I want to get permission to shoot on a railway track?" he'd say, "I have the name of somebody." There are only a few rich people in Indonesia, and they have a network; he is related to these rich people. I make use of his network and his ability to get things done.

I wanted to include an interview with the Bali bomber in *Promised Paradise*. In the film you see Agus finding the footage of the interview on the black market, but actually I got that footage from the person who really did the interview, somebody who had been a student in one of my single-shot cinema workshops (I can't name him because I don't want him traced). This man tells me, "The police have asked me to make a portrait of this Bali bomber. What should I ask him?" The police wanted him to ask only factual questions like: "What time did you leave to plant the bomb?" and "What ingredients were used in the bomb?" I wanted to hear the guy talk about his ideology, and I suggested some questions. The police hadn't wanted any ideological questions, but later he told them—this was very clever—"Well, I had to make him feel comfortable so he would trust me with information; we don't have to use that footage." They didn't use the footage but I did, so, in a way, I was able to interview the Bali bomber. For *Promised Paradise*, I edited the interview so that Agus seems to be interviewing him in his funny way.

**The Netherlands has produced a number of important documentary filmmakers: Joris Ivens is a foundational figure and, like you, somewhere in between an experimental filmmaker and a more conventional documentarian. The same can be said about Johan van der Keuken.**

I met Ivens once at a premiere of his *Une histoire de vent* in 1988, but he was very old. I only shook his hand. I always liked Bert Haanstra's films very much, even though he uses narration: his cinematography and his observations are so striking. When I'm filming, I often think, is this an Ivens moment, or a van der Keuken moment, or a Haanstra moment?

**Are there particular non-Dutch filmmakers you're drawn to?**

Sergio Leone is in first place, because of the way he moves his camera, and Stanley Kubrick, Akira Kurosawa, [Andrei] Tarkovsky. I like [Steven] Spielberg's earlier films.

Recently, I was inspired by a scene in Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* [2005]. Tom Cruise's character is driving a car and the camera goes around the car. They're stressed *in* the car, but their stress doesn't come across. When I saw that, I thought to myself, "They should have moved with the camera *into* the car, where the stress is," and I made a little scene on video to demonstrate the flexibility of my Steadywings apparatus, a camera mount you hold in your hands and with which I was able to have the camera go *through* a moving car; my brother Johan was inside the car, helping to move the Steadywings through the window on one side and back out the window on the other side. [See www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0u7noFBK6M for a demonstration of this use of the Steadywings.]

Mosque sound system
*The Shape of the Moon*. © 2004 Scarabee Films, Coöperatie Scarabee.

**Could you talk about your ideas for the third part of the trilogy?**

Yes. *The Position of the Stars* will focus more specifically on the daughter, Tari, and the world of young people in Jakarta. It will be more about the future of Indonesia and about how Tari grows and begins to rebel against her uncle Bachtiar.

I will be trying to reach a younger audience, so I will be using a young editor, Jasper Naaijkens, to edit the film. While at Harvard, we plan to show every version we make to the students to find out what works best for young people. Maybe I can explain the inner thoughts of Tari and her friends by using music, a method used by the Bollywood movies, which are very popular in Indonesia. The film will still be a documentary and all the scenes will be real-life moments, but I'll use music to add another level. I was even thinking of having my daughter Angel, who is a very good singer, do the singing. She is also a character in the film because she is good friends with Tari. I'm curious to see how far you can go with this way of filming and still have a documentary. Of course, it's also true that in *The Shape of the Moon* I did not end up doing what I had planned. I'll be filming from within events and who knows where events will lead?

SCOTT MACDONALD interviews independent filmmakers for the ongoing series, *A Critical Cinema* (University of California Press).

ABSTRACT An interview with Leonard Retel Helmrich, a Dutch–Indonesian documentary filmmaker whose recent work (*The Eye of the Day, The Shape of the Moon*) reflects the increasing impact of Islamic fundamentalism on Indonesian society. He discusses his commitment to the idea of cinema as motion and his innovations in equipment design.

KEYWORDS Leonard Retel Helmrich, *The Eye of the Day, The Shape of the Moon, Flight from Heaven, Promised Paradise*

# BLOOD AND SUGAR: THE FILMS OF DUŠAN MAKAVEJEV

## NINA POWER REVISITS FIVE RADICAL, MIXED-GENRE FILMS FROM 1965–74 THAT EXPLORE SEX AND REVOLUTION

Sex is boring: Michel Foucault's claim in an interview from 1983, from around the time of his *History of Sexuality* project, is as good a summation as any of our current predicament. What was once seen as a force for radical change—political, physical, social—is now nothing but a tacky consumer add-on: "sex appeal" is smeared on everything from shoes to chocolate, from models to cars, and one buys it as one would a cauliflower or some toilet roll. At the same time, despite a general atmosphere of permissive hedonism, the very idea of questioning the sanctity of one's "private life" is unthinkable: the couple, straight or gay, forms the only acceptable goal of human sexual behavior, even if one sleeps with hundreds of people on the way. The current obsession with "the One," the perfect lifetime partner—a key motif of supposedly emancipated television shows such as *Sex and the City* and *Ally McBeal*—demonstrates that in fact desire is indifferent to whether its object is another human being, a handbag, or a pair of shoes. Sex *is* boring. But not so very long ago, in an age we are meant to believe was much sillier, fucking was a revolutionary activity and the nuclear family was a nightmare from which the twentieth century was about to wake up. Radical feminism, in particular, in the work of Shulamith Firestone and others, foresaw a world in which technology would free women from the burden of reproduction, liberating true sexuality and permitting as many different kinds of relations, sexual or otherwise, as humanly possible. But despite the accuracy of Firestone's predictions regarding contraception, IVF, and a certain loosening of everyday morals, no social revolution has occurred. Sexual liberation did not bring with it a corresponding social revolution. We are living, as Alain Badiou often puts it, in the age of the restoration, where creeping moralism and normative models of behavior are sold back to us as objects of desire.

*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3, pps 42–51, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.63.3.42

Contemporary cinema is, at times, haunted by the memory of these failed aspirations. Some recent films, such as Steven Soderbergh's *The Girlfriend Experience* and, in a quite different register, Lars von Trier's *Antichrist*, have examined the contemporary state of sex, reduced as it is to an unstable combination of consumerism and morbid inwardness. Both are morality tales for a depressing age: but there is another story to tell, one which represents a course not taken by cinema or the world at large. The films of Dušan Makavejev long for and hint at a society that would not be blind to human pleasure, that would celebrate sexuality without commodifying it. Makavejev's exploration of visual form, what we might call mixed-genre montage (fiction, documentary, interviews, performance, parody, propaganda), similarly alerts us to the possibility of a new kind of cinema, one that would be able to bridge the gap between big ideas and minor lives. Makavejev is far from mourning lost dreams or reveling in wistful fantasies: what his cinema proposes is not simply "socialism with a human face," but, as Daniel J. Goulding puts it in his chapter on Makavejev in *Five Filmmakers: Tarkovsky, Forman, Polanski, Szabó, Makavejev* (Indiana University Press, 1994), "with a human *body* as well" (236). Makavejev's films should also be included in the small but important category of mid-twentieth century feminist films. Indeed, one of Makavejev's very great strengths is his portrayal of "modern" young women, beginning with Rajka, the strong-willed, independent heroine of *Man Is Not a Bird* (1965). While it would be easy to read Makavejev's women as ciphers for all that is left out in the Soviet vision of humanity—playfulness, desire, and a certain carefree autonomy—they are also fleshed-out, engaging characters in their own right. When violence is meted out to the women in Makavejev's films as it invariably is (the image of a man pushing a woman over features in almost all of the films discussed here, and murderous rage claims the lives of several women), we should not simply understand it as part of the long and dreary history of cinema's desire to revel in

Hypnosis, soap, sugar

*Man Is Not a Bird* (top). *Love Affair, or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator* (bottom left). *Sweet Movie* (bottom right).
© 1965, 1967, 1974 Dušan Makavejev. DVD: Criterion.

the punishment of women, but as the realization that the long-term goal of changing the world is an awful lot harder than it looks. If it is women who are "going to bring us freedom," as Makavejev claimed in an interview for *Village Voice* with Jonas Mekas in 1972, this would have to happen all the way down: the feminist phrase "the personal is political" has never had a filmmaker so willing to try and understand what this might mean as Makavejev. In an age where sex is as dull and omnipresent as any other consumer item, and where western feminism itself is all too often complicit in reinforcing this consumerism, we should ask: what does Makavejev mean to us now?

The five main features under discussion here, *Man Is Not a Bird* (1965), *Love Affair, or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator* (1967), *Innocence Unprotected* (1968), *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* (1971), and *Sweet Movie* (1974), all recently reissued with new subtitles by Criterion (the first three as a boxed set under the Eclipse imprint), share important similarities, even as they cross from black-and-white to color, from Yugoslavia to America, from simple love story to complex cacophonic delirium. If by 1974's *Sweet Movie*, Makavejev had "gone too far" as many thought, and still think, including censors the world over, it should nevertheless be understood as the culmination of a decade's rumination on sexuality, politics, and the cinematic form. But how do we get from a sweet, if painful, love story set among the harsh lunar landscape of a mining town near Bulgaria (*Man Is Not a Bird*) to sex murder and the seduction of children on board a boat bearing a papier-mâché Karl Marx figurehead drifting down the canals of Amsterdam (*Sweet Movie*)? To some extent, the more difficult Makavejev found it to be institutionally accepted—by his native Yugoslavia, by international censors—the more he pushed at the boundaries of "acceptable" avant-garde cinema. Just as Wilhelm Reich's books were burnt in the 1950s and 60s by the FDA in America after first being denounced by the Nazis in the

30s, so Makavejev too was scorched twice over, once by a socialist *nomenklatura* unamused by his sexualized and irreverent take on supposedly serious political matters and later by a western audience perfectly at ease with his depiction of the pomposity and absurdity of communism but rather less happy with his ambiguous and explicit portrayal of sex, particularly the scenes of child seduction in *Sweet Movie*. This latter prurience had significant consequences both for the distribution of the film and for the lives of its participants: the British Board of Film Censors denied the film a U.K. cinema certificate in 1975. One of the film's main actresses, Anna Prucnal, was exiled from Poland, her native country, for seven years on the basis of her role as the revolutionary seductress–murderess. The erotic scenes she performed with several boys offended audiences who would prefer to see children as delicate creatures to be protected from desire rather than sexual beings in their own right. If Makavejev feels a kinship with Wilhelm Reich, however inexactly he depicts Reichian ideas, it is because he too finds himself at odds with the prevailing morality, even as it twists and turns into the twenty-first century.

Although some of Makavejev's ideas and formulations now seem outdated, particularly the gauche depiction of sexual expression, his wilful refusal to provide a secure answer to the problem of how to reconcile the imperfections and contradictions of human desire with the drive toward faultless systems—whether they be socialist, fascist, or capitalist—remains deeply relevant. The materiality of Makavejev's work, its blunt cuts and disconcerting juxtapositions, as well as its damaged utopianism, remind us that beneath the surface of both the everyday and the universal lies a dark force—like a mischievous child, hopped-up on sugar and desiring destruction. Revealing this barely concealed chaos is, Makavejev slyly posits, only the starting point if one is to harness sexual instincts for organic and nonviolent social ends. If Yugoslavia represented a now-defunct way out of the libidinal dead ends of communism's striving for perfection *and* capitalism's commodification of desire, then Makavejev, as perhaps the republic's most important director, is the lost prophet of a more hopeful age, never mind that his Yugoslavia was *itself* a fantasy. In a *New York Times* interview with Cynthia Grenier from 1971, Makavejev remarked: "The whole world is obsessed with the United States today, the USSR above all . . . Ideally, the perfect society would combine all the pleasures of the American consumer society, which Americans themselves don't yet know how to enjoy, and the joys and creativity of the October Revolution—pure and truly communal."

## THE EARLY YEARS, 1965–68

*Man Is Not a Bird*, Makavejev's first feature, was made in little more than a month on a tiny budget in Yugoslavia in the mid-1960s. Industry rumbles along in the background as a doomed love affair, marital strife, drunken violence, and everyday poverty play themselves out in crowded bars, marketplaces, street circus performances, and housing estates. But, as with all of Makavejev's films, *Man Is Not a Bird* quickly reveals itself to be far more than this bare description would indicate. Its subtitle, *A Love Film*, might lead us to believe that the film is chiefly concerned with its two main characters, Jan Rudinski (Janez Vrhovec), a highly skilled mechanic brought into the town (the film is set in the copper-mining basin of Bor) to oversee a project, and Rajka, a tough-minded and humorous hairdresser (played by the astonishingly beautiful Milena Dravić, who will also star in *WR: Mysteries of the Organism*). While the pair do fall into an odd sort of love—with Rajka renting out a room in her parents' house to the silent and dour older Jan, and seducing him after a hypnotist's display before having an affair with a younger man—there is nothing "classical" about this romance. Indeed, its very modernity forces us to rethink what cinema understands a "love story" to be.

*Man Is Not a Bird* opens with a curious indication that this so-called love film shouldn't be understood straightforwardly. A bizarre figure, Roko, "the youngest hypnotist in the Balkans," provides some "opening remarks on negative aspects in love," warning against various kinds of superstitious behaviour. After reeling off a list of such practices—placing bats' wings on chests to stop people moving, eating frescoes to aid fertility, and so on—he concludes, "you see how we unconsciously use magic in the twentieth century." The film is a meditation on older and newer forms of hypnosis, on the mass control of people by powerful ideas. But the ambiguous role of hypnosis in the film points to a further problem: what happens when one superstition (or ideology) gets replaced by another? The role of magic, and the fine line between exceptional human activity—strongmen, circus tricks, swallowing snakes, and so on—and sheer manipulation means that all systems are under suspicion. This goes just as much for local cures for warts as it does for entire political regimes. Makavejev's hypnotists, acrobats, and "men (and women) of steel," who perform marvels to entertain but not to become role models, are in part a critique of the Stalinist images of Stakhanovite workers, with their perfected bodies and relentless drive. But they are also a more straightforward celebration of the absurdities and wonderments of embodied life. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's materialist question

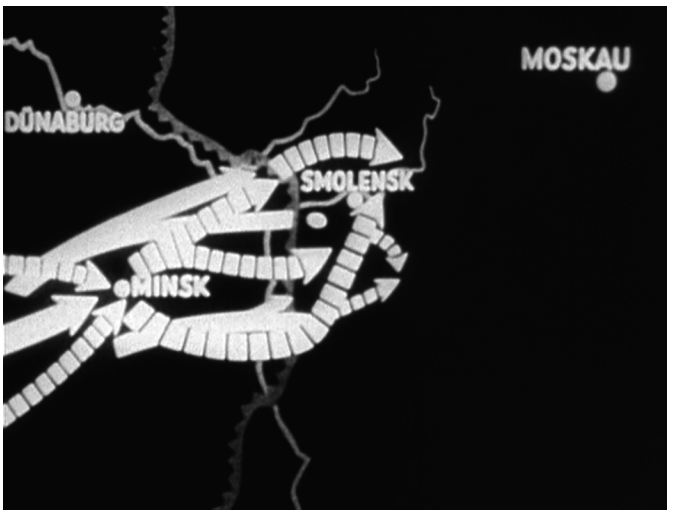
"what can a body do?" is also Makavejev's: what *are* the mysteries of the organism? Or, as the intertitles ask in *Love Affair*, "Will there be a reform of man? Will the new man retain certain old organs?" But the question of bodies is not merely restricted to human beings, for it applies just as much to the many animals and objects captured by Makavejev, whose frames are joyously filled with broken eggs, soap bubbles, sugar, plaster, flour, milk, and chocolate, and, as time goes on, increasingly intimate substances. And Makavejev's fascination with the limits of materials—how far they flow, how easily they fall apart, how they interact—extends to the material of filmmaking itself. How does a documentary interact with an allegorical fiction? How does propaganda footage relate to a closed domestic scene?

Against the backdrop of an intensely cruel and stark landscape, both in its nature and its industry, *Man Is Not a Bird* looks for moments of laughter and oddness amid the misery. Roko the hypnotist returns to perform his show in the town midway through the other stories of infidelity and burgeoning romance which unite the two main women, Rajka and Burbulovic's wife (played by Eva Ras, who will go on to play the lead in *Love Affair*), in a shared enjoyment of watching men kiss one another, hypnotized into believing they are sweethearts. If Makavejev's women up until *Sweet Movie* are almost uniformly liberated, modern, and playful, his men are often extraordinarily uptight. They are Party men, decent men, but men repressed and dampened by work and politics nevertheless. The hypnotist's show induces those on stage to become afraid of nonexistent tigers, then to playact at being cosmonauts ("now we're all cosmonauts . . . you are bodiless and weightless," declares Roko) before asking his captive performers to flap their nonexistent wings like birds. The sublime leap between cosmic ambition—between, say, the Soviet space program during the Cold War, and the harsh realities of everyday scarcity such as that experienced by the residents of Bor—is beautifully illustrated by this scene. The hypnotized fail to be both weightless cosmonauts and birds: man is not nor ever could be a bird, however many times he sends himself into space. As Makavejev put it in an interview in this very magazine (winter 1971–72): "I was trying to explain [in *Man Is Not a Bird*] that you can have global changes but people can still stay the same, unhappy or awkward or privately confused."

In *Love Affair, or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator*, Makavejev tells another unconventional love story, this time between a minority Hungarian switchboard operator, Isabella, and Ahmed, a Muslim Slav who works as a ratcatcher. Despite their potentially "outsider" positions, Makavejev doesn't really play on their status in this sense—they are good workers, good citizens, and very fond of one another for the majority of the film. Yugoslavia, at least in its utopian moments, has risen above petty ethnic and nationalist concerns. Isabella takes in good cheer the one joke Ahmed makes about the supposedly over-sexed nature of Hungarian girls—she is indeed happy to be a sexual being. The shocking darkness of this film comes from the tension-destroying flash-forwards in which we see Isabella's body being raised from a well and carried into a mortuary. Before she even has sex with Ahmed she is dead: the love story is at the same time a tale of murder. The whole setting of the film takes place under the guidance and aegis of two experts, a sexologist and a criminologist, who cut into the story at key moments, including before the main narrative begins.

In *Man Is Not a Bird* the sex scenes, as touching as they are, were extracted from their surroundings, shrouded in darkness, as if the couple were somehow removed from the everyday during the act of lovemaking. Here Makavejev takes a more realistic approach, and is all the more successful for it. When Isabella invites Ahmed back to her house (she lives alone after the death of her mother), she makes him coffee, resourcefully using an iron to heat the liquid as her oven is broken, before offering him a stronger drink and smilingly telling him to come through to the bedroom because "there's a good program on television." It turns out to be Vertov's 1931 *Enthusiasm*, specifically the scenes of churches being toppled by the crowds which are themselves taken from Esther Shub's *The Fall of the Romanovs*. Thus we have a fictional couple watching a documentary within a documentary as a form of seduction: the cinematically informed viewer is thus seduced three times over. "It's more intimate" this way, Isabella suggests, resting her head on Ahmed's shoulder as they watch Vertov. Makavejev's signature technique should in principle undermine the narrative comforts of the love story and the linear progression of a series of events, yet his technique of layering "fact" or documentary footage over the top of fiction, what Dina Iordanova calls (in an interview included on the DVD) "associative montage," serves only to reinforce the ambiguous domesticity of the modern relationship. Even within the frames of domestic life, images of political leaders are dotted around the walls: again, the personal *is* political—if the great systemic projects of the twentieth century attempted to transform humanity all the way down, then the bedroom is either the final place of minimal resistance or the place most symptomatically colonized: it is Makavejev's unwillingness to force the issue one way or another that allows him to treat sex as a political allegory but also as an intensely private act.

## *INNOCENCE UNPROTECTED*: STRONGMAN LOVE STORY



© 1968 Dušan Makavejev. DVD: Criterion Eclipse.

Behind all of Makavejev's playfulness is a relentless and politicized aesthetic project: what is cinema capable of showing? How can it affect us viscerally? Jean-Luc Godard's claim that "I don't think you should feel about a film. You should feel about a woman, not a movie. You can't kiss a movie" is the very antithesis of Makavejev's manifesto for cinema. Despite certain formal similarities between the two directors, Makavejev's entire output, from the uniqueness and beauty of the early films to the later explicit film essays on sexuality and politics, we can say that Makavejev is, above all, going to get a reaction out of you, whether you like it or not: Makavejev is the anti-Godard.

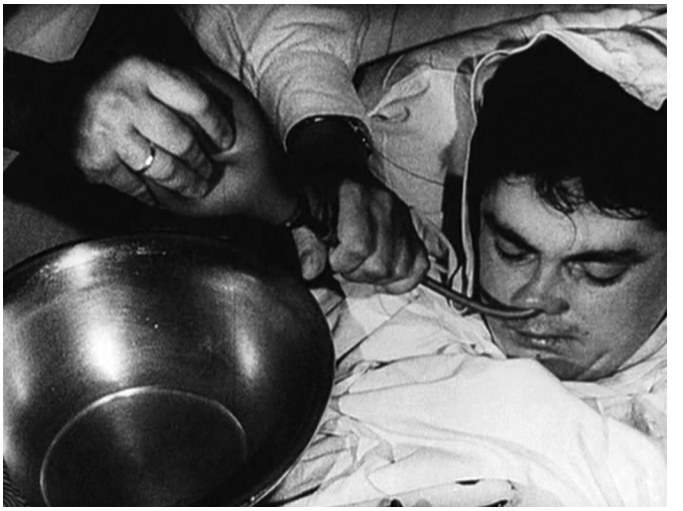
But perhaps Makavejev's best film about love is not really a love story at all. *Innocence Unprotected* (1968), which finishes with a kiss, is, more than any other of his films, Makavejev's paean to cinema and Serbian cinema in particular. It retraces and remixes the story of the first Serbian talkie, the *Innocence Unprotected* of the title, which was released under occupation in 1942. Its director and star, Dragoljub Aleksić, is a strongman, a true "man of steel," banned from performing by the Nazis, who uses a rather clunky romance to showcase his physical abilities. (Similar themes are later resurrected, knowingly or otherwise, by Werner Herzog in his 2001 feature, *Invincible*, in which a Jewish strongman grapples with the paradoxes of his position under Nazi rule.) Makavejev reunites the remaining cast of *Innocence Unprotected*, including Aleksić, who is still able to bend metal with his teeth and perform various hair-raising stunts, despite the intervening decades. As Lorraine Mortimer points out in her extremely insightful and comprehensive recent book on the director, *Terror and Joy: the Films of Dušan Makavejev* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), *Innocence Unprotected* represented a novel direction in his work: after the relative success of *Man Is Not a Bird* and *Love Affair*, Makavejev could have made a feature that extended his international profile. He would of course go on to do this spectacularly with *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* and *Sweet Movie*, but at this point Makavejev explored the touching, local story of one man, Aleksić, of "the artist as industrial laborer," as Paul Arthur puts it (*Cineaste*, July 2005). But Aleksić's story, and the story of the making of the original *Innocence Unprotected*, is not without its serious political dimensions: not only the dangerous nature of making a film under occupation, however seemingly lightweight its content, but also the subsequent disapproval for having released a film during this period meant that the film itself had been hidden from sight for many years. Makavejev's "rescuing" of the film in the guise of an atypical making-of restores the humanity as well as the history surrounding the original release, particularly that of Aleksić, perhaps one of the most unusual directors cinema has ever had—neither particularly intellectual nor wealthy, yet able to make this film and get it screened in impossible circumstances. When Makavejev adds flashes of color to the older stock, he stresses the vibrant strangeness of Aleksić's strongman universe, and the world of a cinema without context. *Innocence Unprotected* is a trip into the "publicly nonexisting" realm of films without peers and without defenders: by focusing on this anomalous event in Yugoslav cinematic history, Makavejev unwittingly presages his own future nonconformity within even the most avant-garde circles.

## SEXPOL AND INTERNATIONAL CONTROVERSY, 1971–74

Regardless of the uniqueness and beauty of Makavejev's earlier features, it is with *WR* that his reputation will stand and fall. Not quite banned, but not available either in Yugoslavia for sixteen years after it was made—"just not allowed," as Makavejev puts it in interviews—the film is an explosive and ambitious mix of Makavejev's earlier obsessions: sex and politics. But it has an international dimension that seeks to address not only repressive forms of social organization but also the dangers of freedom, or at least of the kinds of freedom that twentieth-century America sought to define itself by and against. It is no surprise that many have related Makavejev's work in this period to Herbert Marcuse's thesis in *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) that the supposed freedoms of capitalist choice are only more efficient ways of tightening the shackles of control. Far from being a straightforward celebration of sexual liberation as a superficial reading of the film might indicate, *WR* is in part about the dangerous effects of desire when the latter is—to use the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari once more—"deterritorialized" too quickly. (If you break an egg, it is useful to work out where the inside might land, for fear of soiling your clothes . . .) We have seen in the decades after Makavejev's film how capitalism is faster and more efficient than other systems at recapturing desire for its own ends: *WR* can, in this sense, be read as a warning during a cultural cold war in which the opponents vie for hegemony over human passions. But it is also a film about the inherent unfairness or injustice of desire, regardless of political systems. One may very well want to "fuck freely" in the name of an egalitarian politics as the narrator implores, but there are some people that everyone wants and others whom no one wants at all. A politics based on desire will be unfair.

*WR* caused a riot; how could it not? One of the outcries, oddly enough, was over Makavejev's representation of

## *WR: MYSTERIES OF THE ORGANISM*: THE BATTLE FOR DESIRE



© 1971 Dušan Makavejev. DVD: Criterion Collection.

Wilhelm Reich, the unofficial hero of the film. In *The New York Times* (November 7, 1971), David Bienstock, then Curator of Film at the Whitney Museum of American Art, accused Makavejev of misrepresenting the teachings of Reich: "while Makavejev, on the surface, seems to be praising Reich, the actual content of the film mocks and maligns him. Makavejev then cloaks these distortions in a web of comedy and 'avant garde' ambiguity. It is an old trick. Hide the poison in sugar." Bienstock's irritation at Makavejev's "misinterpretation" of Reich unwittingly reveals something about the filmmaker's strategy, however: "hiding the poison in sugar" will actually form one of the central images of *Sweet Movie* a few years later; as the revolutionary Anna Planeta kills a renegade sailor from the battleship *Potemkin*, the blood from his stab wound taints their shared bed which is, absurdly, entirely made of white sugar. Makavejev is a master at mixing materials: the clean with the dirty, the sweet with the deadly.

*WR* is an astonishing fusion of interviews, found footage, propaganda, fictionalized accounts of the encounters between Yugoslav women and an invented Soviet hero, parodies of political speeches, and a vision of an America dangerously unable to cope with its own desires. It is at once a celebration of Reich's insights (you can read the "WR" of the title as both Reich's initials and "World Revolution") and a critique of the commodification of sexuality, whether it be under capitalism, fascism, or communism. The Fugs' song "Kill For Peace" accompanies Tuli Kupferberg from the band as he wonders around New York, dressed in combat gear, caressing and masturbating a gun and frightening businessmen. Cameos by Jackie Curtis, the glam transvestite from the Theater of the Ridiculous and sculptress Nancy Godfrey, who takes a penis plaster cast of the editor-in-chief of *Screw* magazine, Jim Buckley, all contribute to the idea that "confusion is sex" as Sonic Youth would later put it. Nevertheless, the Yugoslav storyline involving Milena (Milena Dravić), Jagoda (Jagoda Kaloper), and Ljuba (Miodrag Andrić) is perhaps the strongest part of the film—part joyful passion, part ambiguous take-up of the gestures of propaganda in the service of a sexual revolution, as when Milena, dressed half in military gear and half in her nightie, delivers an agitprop speech from the balcony of the tenement building to the proletarian masses below. "Socialism must not exclude human sensual pleasure from its program!" she declares, as a deranged ex-boyfriend chases her precisely for this very same sensual pleasure. Her eventual death, following an orgiastic encounter with a Soviet ice-skating champion who can't handle the unleashing of pleasure that Milena induces, is vicious, but strangely in keeping with the excessive nature of the film as a whole: the Soviet Union can't accept a different kind of socialism, its men can't accept a different kind of woman. Milena's decapitated head lives on in the clinical setting of the morgue, carrying on her defence of revolutionary lovemaking. In recent interviews, included on the DVDs, Makavejev has spoken about current sexual liberation being only "freedom to discharge ourselves as machines." Characters such as Milena represent a perhaps impossible alternative: a revolution in permanent movement rather than the "frozen" ones of Mao or Stalin, where political energy gets locked into fixed institutions and new forms of moralism. Makavejev stages the difficult moment between repression and liberation: what results is not the hippie fantasy of free, warmly expressed desire but a kind of dangerously overly emotive state, all too easily captured by cults of personality, groupthink, and fascism. "Can we organize liberation step-by-step?" Makavejev asks in one interview, mourning the all-too-quick slippage from repression to release to commodification. But it was *WR* that saw it coming all along.

With *Sweet Movie*, Makavejev deliberately forgets his step-by-step idea of liberation and opts instead for a study in revulsion, bodily and conceptual. The major sensation conjured up by *Sweet Movie* is disgust, and there are parallels with the work of the contemporary artist Paul McCarthy, a reveling in a combination of cultural nausea and sickness of a more visceral, immediate kind. Makavejev's characters are murderers, seducers, chat-show hosts, gynecologists, capitalists, and renegades from revolutionary eras. But the true stars of the film are the myriad substances that seep from the lens in hyperreal color: blood, shit, breast milk, food, chocolate. If *Sweet Movie* is, as Makavejev describes it in one of the DVD interviews, "a love letter to Kodak," it's a love letter one might handle rather gingerly, for fear of contamination. The objects of his scorn remain much the same as in earlier films: the cheapness of capitalism, the deadly pomposity of ossified political systems, but the tone has changed. What was once a joyful and multidimensional act—sex—is now merely a commodity to be won on a TV show. Women are to be dumped in suitcases and smeared in chocolate. With *Sweet Movie* one is left with the unnerving question, has the whole world become horrible? A rubbish dump of ideas and useless substances? Did Makavejev give up on thinking that there might be another way out? Against the grain of the film, some have tried to excavate an optimism from Makavejev's most deliberately unpleasant work: for Stanley Cavell, in an essay included with the DVD, *Sweet Movie* "attempts to extract hope . . . from the very fact that we are capable of disgust at the world." Perhaps this is so, but it is a very different kind of hope than that hinted at by Makavejev's films a decade before. It is

## *SWEET MOVIE*: SICKLY PLEASURES

© 1974 Dušan Makavejev. DVD: Criterion Collection.

relatively easy to see the film as a pessimistic response to the assimilation of the very things, freedom and sexuality, that Makavejev sought to explore so boldly, yet subtly, in his earlier films.

Again the film was met in the first place by a combination of repulsion and bafflement, and these remain the overwhelming responses to this day, legally and aesthetically. As Vincent Canby writing in *The New York Times* at around the film's release (October 10, 1975), put it: "it is, I think, supposed to be an erotic political comedy, which may be a contradiction in terms." Of course, he could have been talking about almost any of Makavejev's output here, but the fact remains that *Sweet Movie* is an extraordinarily difficult film to like or enjoy: the scenes with members of Otto Muehl's commune in which they vomit on one another, rub excrement into each others' chests, make out while covered in food, and generally howl much like Lars von Trier's "idiots" will do many years later, is undeniably unpleasant, unaestheticized, and luridly shot. But perhaps this is the point.

The film's attack on American puritanism and crassness, as captured in the gynecological beauty show that opens the film, is undeniably heavy-handed. The utterly idiotic and money-centric Mr Kapital (John Vernon) wins the prize girl, a virginal Miss Canada (Carole Laure) whom he later daubs with alcohol to clean her before thrusting his golden penis, which shoots out clear water in her general direction. Understandably, she freaks out, and attempts to run away, leading to a series of encounters with male sexual stereotypes (the well-hung black man, the macho Latino romancer). She winds up in a daze at a commune with Otto Muehl and his merry band where she mostly refuses to play along, pausing only to suckle on some breast milk or gently caress a flaccid penis—but it's not clear that Laure is acting her disturbance in these scenes, which only adds to the discomfort. Meanwhile, Anna Planeta (Anna Prucnal) is merrily sailing the canals of Amsterdam in a boat called *Survival*. The vessel happens to be filled with sweets and sugar, which assist in her seduction of several male children and of a leftover sailor from *Potemkin* (Pierre Clémenti). While there are moments of real joy and celebration in *Sweet Movie*, the overriding feeling is one of "too-muchness." This applies particularly to the spliced-in Nazi footage of the Katyn massacre, the mass murder of thousands of Polish military officers, policemen, intellectuals, and civilian prisoners of war by the Soviet NKVD, which was only admitted by Russia recently (the incident is also the subject of *Katyn*, Andrzej Wajda's 2008 film). The corpses of the Polish officers receive an odd mirroring at the end of the film where all of Anna's lovers are laid out on the banks of the canal, emerging from their cocoons as not quite lifeless after all. The juxtaposition of images again has the disturbing effect of feeling a little too much, not right at all: if this was the effect Makavejev was after then he succeeded in spades, but it is difficult to isolate a notion of hope amid all the various minor and world-historical horrors that Makavejev parades before us.

Perhaps because of the distaste and scandal generated by *Sweet Movie*, Makavejev's star began to wane rather earlier than might have been expected of someone capable of making at least the first four of these re-releases. He has struggled to get funding, although he has made several notable films since the mid-1970s. But his output from the mid-60s to the mid-70s remains fundamental to an understanding of European cinema, and, beyond that, to the now closed-off possibilities of other ways of conceiving sex, politics, and film itself. Makavejev's vision of a republic of free love, albeit a free love that understands the dangers of letting go too quickly, is both a celebration and a warning. It would be tempting to believe that we have outgrown Makavejev, that we belong to a time where sex has very little to do with politics, and cinema has very little to do with either, except as titillation in both cases (recent attempts to depict "politics," such as Uli Edel's *The Baader Meinhof Complex* is as pornographic as anything found on a seedy Internet portal). If Makavejev leaves us discomforted, we should recognize this uneasiness as the reminder of what has been misplaced and forgotten in the decades separating us from his major works. However, we would do well to remain open to both the spirit and the specifics of these ruminations on love and politics, for if they have no part to play, then things may be even worse than we imagine.

NINA POWER is the author of *One Dimensional Woman* (Zero Books, 2009), a critique of contemporary feminism.

ABSTRACT A reconsideration of the fruitful 1965–75 period in Yugoslav director Dušan Makavejev's career, arguing that *Man Is Not a Bird, Love Affair, or The Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator, Innocence Unprotected, WR: Mysteries of the Organism,* and *Sweet Movie* raise questions about sexuality and politics which remain important.

KEYWORDS *Man Is Not a Bird, Love Affair, Innocence Unprotected, WR: Mysteries of the Organism, Sweet Movie*

DVD DATA *Dušan Makavejev: Free Radical* [*Man Is Not a Bird, Love Affair, or The Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator, Innocence Unprotected*]. 1965, 1967, 1968 © 2009 Dušan Makavejev. Publisher: Criterion Eclipse, 2009. $44.95, 3 discs.

*WR: Mysteries of the Organism.* © 1971 Dušan Makavejev. Publisher: Criterion Collection, 2007. $39.95, 1 disc.

*Sweet Movie.* © 1974 Dušan Makavejev. Publisher: Criterion Collection, 2007. $29.95, 1 disc.

# WHAT'S NEW?

Many people go to annual film festivals to be the first person on their block to see the latest Coen brothers' film. The excitement and glamour of the new, mixed with glimpses of celebrity, animate hectic pilgrimages to far-flung cities. These festivals boast multiple screens, competing choices, and long lines; critics work non-stop to characterize what's new.

But there is another festival with a very different kind of glamour, devoted not to what's new but what has been resurrected from the dead. At the Pordenone festival of "silent" cinema in northern Italy there is only one screen and there is never a line. Here, the pace is leisurely. There is time to eat, talk, digest (in every way), and to then be fortified for the next round of films. Should you have a question or a quarrel about what you just saw, the scholar who wrote the program note or the archivist who achieved the restoration may be sitting at the next table and eager to talk. A yearly feast of the very best restorations and discoveries of international silent film, played at appropriate speeds and with great musical accompaniment, Pordenone is a sheer delight.

If there are few professional film critics working non-stop to characterize what's new at Le Giornate del Cinema Muto (literally: The Days of Silent Cinema), there is nevertheless a powerful audience buzz that affects what will be seen and taught about silent cinema for years to come. At least since 1989—the year the subtle melodramas of Evgenii Bauer, a prolific Russian director from 1913–17, were rediscovered—Pordenone has had a profound effect on the understanding of the heritage of silent cinema.

It was at Pordenone that Frank Borzage's *Lucky Star* (1929) and Paul Fejos's *Lonesome* (1928) were rediscovered; that Leo McCarey's *Pass the Gravy* (1928) proved a truly convulsive, but not clown-oriented comedy (about a pet chicken accidentally cooked and eaten by a family); and that Shanghai melodramas demonstrated that pre-revolutionary China had perfected the art of female suffering while wedding it to political struggle. It was there also that a stirring retrospective of the career of Dziga Vertov offered a sustained, poignant look at the hopes and disappointments of another revolution. Finally, in what is to date the festival's most extensive undertaking, there was *The Griffith Project*. It began in 1997 with a full orchestra-accompanied screening of *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) in a restoration that, the late David Gill noted, "nobody wanted." For the next eleven years, the festival screened in chronological order all 500-plus existing Griffith films, accompanied each year by a newly published volume of commentaries. The retrospective, and the twelve volumes of *The Griffith Project*, concluded last year, leaving a hole to fill.

The festival's mission has always been to dig deeply into the past, finding fresh contexts for understanding national cinemas and international movements, sub-movements, and forms, inclusive of avant-gardes and even, in occasional late-night screenings, works of pornography. But after twenty-seven years of excavation, and with a new generation of silent aficionados to foster, the question arises: where does one go after *tutti* Griffith? Dare the festival repeat itself? The answer, this year, in a series entitled *The Canon Revisited*, was a resounding, if not altogether coherent, yes. The new initiative is described in the program as follows: "Each year we will select a group of 'canonical' films, hailed as cornerstones by the pioneers of our field and further promoted by their successors . . . We intend to give these films another opportunity to speak to us, in a form as close as possible to the way in which they were originally created, before they enter the digital domain once and for all. In some cases, this may be their last big celluloid chance." This year (October 3–10) seven features were screened in the new strand: *J'accuse* (Abel Gance, 1919), *The Golem* (*Der Golem*, Paul Wegener, 1920), *The Saga of Gunnar Hede* (*Gunnar Hedes Saga*, Mauritz Stiller, 1923), *The Ten Commandments* (Cecile B. DeMille, 1923), *The Master of the House* (*Du skal aere din hustru*, Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1925), *The House on Trubnaya Street* (*Dom Na Trubnoi*, Boris Barnet, 1928), and *Railway Tracks* (*Rotaie*, Mario Camerini, 1929).

All seven were compelling films magnificently accompanied, but very few among them can be counted as certifiably "canonical" (even with the obligatory scare quotes around the originally biblical word). Dreyer's charming and heartwarming domestic comedy, which gently chastens a stern family patriarch, is a delight precisely because it is not the Dreyer we typically admire. Camerini's study of a young couple down on their luck, certainly deserves to *become* a classic; its opening sequence in which the couple checks into a hotel in order to commit suicide is as stunning a piece of melodrama as the swamp sequence of F. W. Murnau's *Sunrise: A*

*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3, pps 52–54, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.63.3.52

*Song of Two Humans* (1927). Barnet's class-conflict comedy centered on a large apartment whose communal staircase hardly ever gets cleaned is also a delightful surprise. *The House on Trubnaya Street* has all the montage effects one expects from an early Soviet film and all the correct political lessons about the rights of workers, but from the very beginning when a pathetic country girl loses her goose in city traffic, and the film stops and rewinds to tell us how this situation came about, it is animated by a great spirit of play. Even missing a late reel, it builds to a hilarious climax. With the possible exception of *The Golem*, these are all works in the familiar tradition of the Pordenone "revelation"—that is, insufficiently recognized films that counter stereotypes about their authors and countries of origin; for example, that Camerini even directed great silent films, or that a Soviet director and Dreyer could be funny.

Consider, furthermore, *The Ten Commandments*: an epic certainly, but has it ever been a canonical one? It is neither a cornerstone, nor an unknown. Actually it is very well-known for its "cast-of-thousands" staging of the story of Exodus, including the parting of the Red Sea. What was "revealed" here was the film's second half, an intimate modern story about two brothers, rivals in love, one of whom upholds, the other of whom systematically breaks, the Ten Commandments. This story offers an abrupt but welcome interruption to that of the Exodus. Abandoning the Israelites to the wilderness, our attention turns instead to the two brothers in San Francisco, both in love with the same waif, and to their stern mother who only learns the appropriate New Testament values when, too late, a church collapses upon her. Some of the best material here is actually the subtle emotional interplay between the two brothers and the waif, enhanced by Jeannie MacPherson's witty script. While DeMille's dramatization of Exodus typifies the lavish Hollywood spectacles of the mid-1920s, his American story was derided in its day. But it is this economical modern story with its less preachy assertion of the need for a gentler code that now holds our attention.

Perhaps the only film that really fit the "canon revisited" rubric was Gance's epic melodrama *J'accuse*. Here, we really do have a canonical film whose revisiting is opportune. *J'accuse* was the most important anti-war film of its time and has only recently been reconstructed to an approximation of its original length. A still-early work by one of the great (and most grandiose) auteurs of the silent era, and a film whose fervent pacifist message is perfectly in tune with much of today's audience, it elicited a prolonged standing ovation. After the shell-shocked poet Jean Diaz, played by Romuald Joubé, driven mad by his experiences of the trenches, returns home from war, he raises the mutilated bodies of the war dead from their graves to reprimand the living. The raised dead come to the window of the living asking to be assured that their sacrifice has been worth it. This question, "Was it worth it?" is one many families affected by war are often afraid to ask. After "The Great War" Gance was not afraid to ask it. The answer is never clear. Though the uneasy dead, somewhat reassured by the sight of the living, back away to return to their battlefield graves, it is not apparent that the living and the dead can communicate or satisfy one another. Nor can Diaz take up his old life and go back to writing odes to peace. To return from war, the film implies, is not to return to peace or even to the living. Gance's

Shellshock and mass burial
*J'accuse* (Abel Gance, 1919). DVD: Flicker Alley.

over-the-top melodrama explores death in both wildly metaphorical and psychologically acute ways, never catching us up in the excitement of war, only in its devastation.

In its main mission of discovery, this year's festival did not fall short. In a tribute to Albatros Films, the production team composed of emigrants to France after the Russian Revolution, two films staring the great comedian Nicolas Rimsky stood out: *The Happy Death* (*L'heureuse mort*, 1924) and *Maxim's Porter* (*Le chasseur de chez Maxim's*, 1927). *Happy Death*, especially, is a deft comedy about a failing Parisian playwright who finds himself idolized—as only the French can do it—after he is presumed dead. Rimsky's enthusiasm for his own late-lamented greatness is a gem of comic timing as is his dual role as his brother who arrives to help celebrate the dead. A gorgeous print of the Rudolph Valentino vehicle, *The Eagle* (1925)—though only with a pre-recorded score—revealed the swashbuckling and good-humored (as well as the pre-Code amorous) side of this great star.

A short *Divas* program revealed an early Francesca Bertini in *Love without Esteem* (*Amore senza stima*, 1912) in which the heroine prostitutes herself in order to buy the gun with which she will kill the man who has impregnated and abandoned her. Another Bertini vehicle, *Marion, the Café-Concert Singer* (*Marion, aritista di caffè-concerto*, 1920) is incomplete, but contains the following, priceless piece of maternal advice to a daughter: "Believe in nothing. Never fall in love. Avoid old men." Naturally the daughter, as played by Bertini, breaks all three rules. A twenty-one-year-old Pola Negri shines as a snake-fondling vamp in the German-made *When the Heart Glows with Hate* (*Wenn Das Herz in Hab Erglüht*, 1918) and *Asta Nielsen als Mannequin* (c. 1915) in which Nielsen does no more than pose in various costumes in a series of test shots, or another short test in which she boxes with a black man, proved of more interest than the seriously chopped-up rediscovered feature, *The Beloved Roswolskys* (*Die Geliebte Roswolskys*, 1921), in which Nielsen plays a chorus girl rumored to be the mistress of a wealthy man. Of course Nielsen is the ultimate diva and worth watching in anything, but we can only hope this film will be restored to its full coherence. Of all the strands, only the one devoted to Sherlock Holmes films from around the world, *Sherlock and Beyond*, seemed to drag on, generating little enthusiasm.

"Silent cinema," as every lover of the era knows, is a misnomer. Devotees come to Pordenone as much for the sound as the image. For not only is the festival the home of non-talking, non-synch-sound films, it is the place where the world's greatest film accompanists gather. If the movie stars are dead, the musicians—the real stars of this festival—are very much alive and it is they who bring the ghosts back to life. Stephen Horne's haunting three-hour-plus piano solo accompaniment to *J'accuse* grippingly did that in an alternately powerful and desolate interpretation. Maud Nelissen's new score for Erich von Stroheim's dazzling and wonderfully dark version of Franz Lehár's opera, *The Merry Widow* (1925), is the first time Lehár's own music, blended with Nelissen's darker take on Stroheimian perversions, has been used to accompany the film. Though one might think that bringing the Lehár back into the film would lighten it, in fact it deepens the feeling. Gunter Buchwald's piano accompaniment to *The House on Trubnaya Street* was wonderfully inventive. The only outright failure was Touve Ratovondrahety's ponderous approach to Jacques Feyder's pictorially gorgeous but excessively long and sometimes aimless *Carmen* (1926). Betty Olivero's score for *The Golem* was beautifully performed by a group of violinists and one very busy clarinetist. I found myself moved by the music but not similarly moved by the film, whose vapidity and lack of coherence seemed newly exposed despite the color-tinting and glorious condition of the print. Perhaps that, too, can be the value of inspired musical accompaniment!

The wealth of discoveries combined with a few looks back at already established classics assure us that Pordenone will continue to do what it has done best—and this includes masterclasses by musicians, lectures by famous programmers and archivists—this year by the Berkeley Pacific Film Archive's Edith Kramer, and a "collegium" for students. In retrospect, what is perhaps most odd about the creation of the *Canon Revisited* program is that the organizers felt they had to create such a category in the first place. Rather than revisiting a "canon" that will always prove to be in flux anyway, perhaps a better direction would be to create a category of "Reprise"—important films, good, bad, little-known, well-known, perhaps already shown at the festival but which, like the films of *The Griffith Project*, are in need of further discussion and debate. The point, after all, is really to have a capacious enough structure to screen a wide range of films, even if they don't belong to one of the festival's main categories. Notes could then be solicited for the films that are deemed to deserve this reprise.

I have attended Pordenone on and off for the last twenty-two years. I also participated briefly in *The Griffith Project*. I am certainly not impartial when I say this festival is the most congenial, the most purely pleasurable place to discover what's "new" in the world of "old" film, but I assert it nevertheless!

LINDA WILLIAMS is Professor of Film Studies and Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley.

# THINGS SAID AGAIN

### London Film Festival Artists' Film and Video Weekend (BFI Southbank)

As a result of public access and digitization programs, archival moving images are more available than ever before to both filmmakers and audiences, renewing the wellspring for "found footage" film. The London Film Festival's annual Artists' Film and Video Weekend was dominated this year (October 24–25, 2009) by films from, or using, the archive—kicking off with a mammoth four-hour screening of a restoration (a collaboration between Anthology Film Archives, MoMA, New York University, and the National Film Preservation Foundation) of Hollis Frampton's *Hapax Legomena* (literally: *Things Said Once*), a series made between 1971 and 1972 which developed Frampton's distinctive approach to film history, a kind of deadpan structuralism.

In the first film, *Nostalgia* (1971), a series of twelve photographs is burned on a hot plate. Occupying the whole frame, each image disintegrates as the distinctive S-shape of the element is revealed and the photograph blackens to ash. Meanwhile, Michael Snow reads a text by Frampton, telling us the circumstances in which each photograph was taken during Frampton's pre-filmmaking career as a photographer. But the storytelling is displaced: as we watch a picture burn, the narrative describes one we are yet to see. The tension between memory and anticipation is held until at last Snow asks us urgently of a final unseen image: "Here it is. Look at it. Can you see what I see?" The pictures include portraits of artists Carl Andre and Frank Stella, and *Nostalgia* is given extra dimensions not only by the laconic manner in which it writes personal history over film history, but also by the tangential glimpse it offers into the lower Manhattan art scene of the 1950s and 60s.

*Poetic Justice* (1972) literally films a script. A stack of sheets with a felt-tipped narrative is piled up scene by scene on a desk. A relationship develops between the characters Me, You, and Your Lover. *Critical Mass* (1971) plays out an argument between two young lovers by looping the soundtrack incrementally: each loop returns almost to its starting point and ends a little further into the argument. While the technical effect is both beautiful and disconcerting, the larger implication that all emotional arguments are circular doesn't go unmissed.

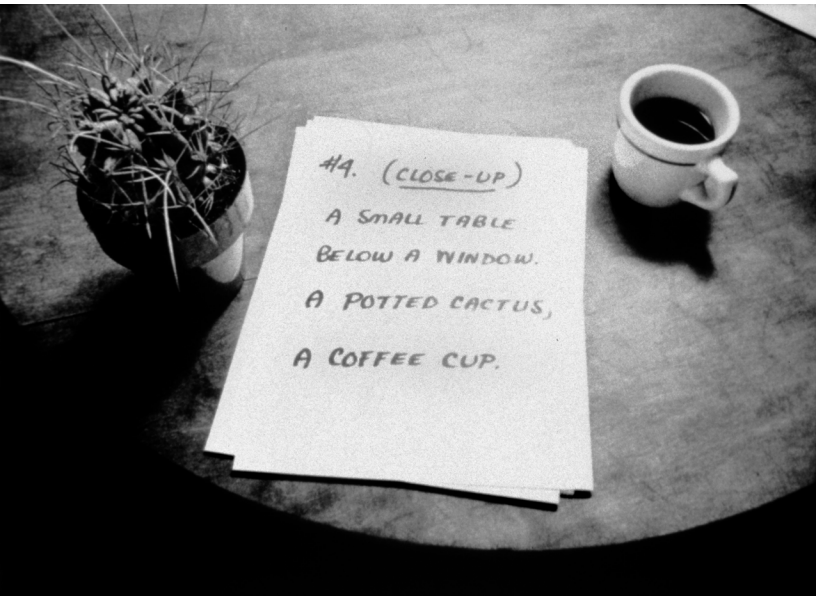
*Travelling Matte* (1971) and *Ordinary Matter* (1972) are complementary travelogues. In *Travelling Matte*, an experiment with early video-masking technology, Frampton's hands frame the shots of a restless camera, sometimes narrowing what is visible to a mere fragment between fingers. *Ordinary Matter*'s soundtrack of toneless (and hence meaningless) Mandarin syllables accompanies a hectic journey through rural and urban space: a headlong rush through countryside, across the Brooklyn Bridge, circling around Stonehenge (its megalithic apertures calling to mind a prehistoric zoetrope) and then back to cornfields filmed at a child's height, a jumble of sun and leaves.

*Remote Control* (1972) presents the history of moving image as a dense flickering montage of film and television; the ghostly face of Richard Nixon repeatedly appears. Finally *Special Effects* (1972) presents nothing more than an unsteady dotted line around the screen, the frame into which viewers, at last, must put something. Those, that is, who remain: the cinema is notably less full at the end of *Special Effects* than it was at the beginning of *Nostalgia*.

Approaching the history of film from an entirely different angle, *FILM IST. a girl and a gun* (2009) forms the thirteenth chapter and third full-length feature of Gustav Deutsch's ongoing historical investigation into the phenomenology of film. The preceding works, *Film ist. 1–6* (1998) and *Film ist. 7–12* (2002) built up a composite picture of the development of early film. The first investigates primitive cinema's experiments in capturing duration, light, and motion. The second recalls the early forms of cinematic narrative entertainment: comedy, drama, romance. Each film consists only of a montage, building up a sense of the medium from the juxtaposition of isolated moments.

*FILM IST. a girl and a gun* focuses on the appearance of sex and violence in film history. Taking its title from D. W. Griffith's maxim, revived by Jean-Luc Godard, that "all you need to make a movie is a girl and a gun," the film opens with sharpshooter Annie Oakley and ends with the gunshot-to-camera of Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). Footage assembled from the first four decades of cinema abounds with images of fecundity, children, bondage, romantic pursuit, pornography, violence, and guns that grow ever larger as the twentieth century becomes more accomplished

*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3, pps 55–57, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.63.3.55



From deadpan structuralism to ethnography
Clockwise from top left: *Poetic Justice/FILM IST. a girl and a gun/Me broni ba/Ivul.* Courtesy of London Film Festival.

at making war. A safe, combination lock set to "EROS," opens to reveal further scenes of seduction; women hold cigarettes, pearls, and fruit between their teeth. These playful erotics are supplemented with darker visions from the Kinsey Institute's film collection, early stag films, and clinical close-ups of the sexual act.

Deutsch structures the film in five sections: "Genesis," "Paradise," "Eros," "Thanatos," and "Symposium." He includes allusive intertitles: fragments of mythology, Sappho, and Plato. Taking a liberal approach to tinting and toning, he adds a palette of twelve colors to provide further visual continuity. Stretching the tradition of the found footage film, which typically sets up tension between original context and a critical narrative, in *FILM IST. a girl and a gun* Deutsch attempts, like Frampton, to critique the entire history of film itself. Where *Hapax Legomena* manipulates the content to reveal the artificial nature of the medium, Deutsch's liberties with form seek to reveal the universal human desires that underlie all moving image.

The archive also makes an irruption into Andrew Kötting's *Ivul* (2009), not technically part of the festival's *Experimenta* strand but rather a Swiss–French co-production and part of the *Cinema Europa* section. Nevertheless, the screening was scheduled into the Saturday night slot of the

avant-garde weekend, and rightly so; a prophet without funding in his own country Kötting may be, but the experimental tradition is where he belongs. Kötting works across a variety of forms, and *Ivul* is his third stand-alone feature film, part of a planned trilogy and notional sequel to *This Filthy Earth* (2001), itself based on Zola's *La Terre*. Kötting's twin obsessions of landscape and Oedipal trauma come straight to the surface in the tale of Alex, the son of an exiled Russian aristocrat. Caught in a sexually compromising situation with his own sister and confronted with his father's rage he takes to the roofs and Pyrenean treetops, vowing never to touch the ground again. Played with astonishing skill by circus performer Jacob Auzanneau, Alex inevitably comes to a sticky end.

Bookending the narrative is film gleaned from the Screen Archive South East, one of the U.K.'s regional film archives. Kötting's inspiration for Alex's airborne protest is "off-ground he" (a "tag" type of schoolyard game in which a player is safe if she is standing on an object and off the ground). Footage of children playing this gives way to images of all forms of levitational activity: swings and climbing frames, stilt-walking. With more chutzpah, when Alex's sister travels to Russia, her letter home is narrated over scenes of icy seas, purportedly Baltic, but in fact a particularly cold Margate winter in 1934. Kötting himself divides his time between Hastings and the south of France, and his love for the Pyrenees is apparent in the landscape photography (particularly the final stunning aerial shot), but through Kötting's use of the archive *Ivul* pays a curious debt to the south of England too.

⁂

Works by two artists who deal directly with film as a material object stood out in the "Whirl of Confusion" program. Greg Pope's *Shot Film* (2009) is just that: a reel of dark leader which has been blasted with a shotgun. This film itself (and not a print) is directly projected: full of lightning flashes and percussive cracks that bring to mind other acts of breaking into black film like Len Lye's *Particles in Space* (1979).

The sound of David Gatten's films are often created by the work that has taken place on the film strip and spread across the optical soundtrack: a softly gritty hiss that is neither Stan Brakhage's rigorous silence nor the correlative synthesis that Norman McLaren achieved by directly projecting the soundtrack, but a gentler reminder that the soundtrack too is merely part of a piece of film. In *Film for Invisible Ink, case no. 142 Abbreviation for Dead Winter [diminished by 1,794]* (2008) he continues his concentration on the physical manifestation of words as print. As though traveling through the surface of the material, the film brings into focus the dark strands that compose the pulpy, fibrous elements of a single sheet of printed paper. The film finishes with a quotation from Darwin on the evolution of difference through separation during glacial periods. That exactly how Gatten achieves his effects remains obscure in some ways only heightens the fascination with the relationship between his materials and the finished film. Frampton's concern with the materiality of film is still alive in the work of Gatten and Pope.

The weekend also suggests that while documentary is more popular than ever as mainstream entertainment, ethnography still provides some challenges that can only be adequately met with experimental practice. In the program entitled "The Exception and the Rule," Akosua Adoma Owusu's *Me broni ba* (*My White Baby*, 2008) weaves together a family incident (Owusu's sister, newly arrived in America from Ghana, touched the blond hair of her new classmates) with images of Ghanaian hairdressers practicing braiding skills on white dolls. Reversing typically American concerns for ethnically correct toys, it also speaks of Owusu's uneasiness at living between two cultures, and the way she expresses it through hairstyle. The film's final super-slow-motion shot shows Owusu's own braids flying around her head, shortly before she cut them off.

In the same program Karen Mirza and Brad Butler's *The Exception and The Rule* (2009), a part of their larger project, *The Museum of Non Participation*, is a collaborative work made with several Pakistani artists, shot in India and Pakistan, on both film and video. In some ways it operates as a reenactment of the history of avant-garde filmmaking. One artist declares that in all films henceforth he shall mention Partition, referencing Godard's similar commitment to Vietnam. Others reenact conceptual artworks—Vito Acconci's *Following Piece* and Dan Graham's *Performer/Audience/Mirror*—in specifically South Asian contexts. At the same time, through discussion and self-conscious intertitles, the film exposes itself as a tentative experiment in working together between and across physical borders.

*The Exception and The Rule* feels perpetually in danger of drowning in its own theoretical concerns. By comparison *Me broni ba* is a warmer, more human work, based in personal experience; in conversation after the screening, Owusu was more willing to speak directly about her inspiration than Mirza and Butler. What both films project, though, is a sense that for their makers the crossing of cultural boundaries requires more than a mere acknowledgment of difference.

DANNY BIRCHALL is Web Editor at London's Wellcome Collection.

# SCREEN MEMORY IN *WALTZ WITH BASHIR*

A cartoon anti-war movie? In Ari Folman's 2008 *Waltz with Bashir*, given an Israeli combat plot cast into flashback within a story of post-traumatic stress disorder and memory loss, what kind of hurdles to political conviction or even good taste does animation erect? Or what ironies release? Following on from all the contemporary war films about American incursions in Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan (with the digital blitz of their high-tech quasi-documentary treatment[1]), why return us not just to a former Mideast carnage in 1982 Lebanon but to the literal drawing board?

Despite assumptions in the press, there is no rotoscoping (digital tracing) involved. The technique is "cut-out animation," with the videotaped movements of real actors used as rough models for the "animatics" of a "videoboard," whose subdivided jigsaw shapes are only then fed into a computer program that calibrates the sectored rhythms of human movement. Though the level of kinetic detail has been limited (as Folman explains on the DVD commentary) by his electronic production budget, such constraints are in fact cashed out stylistically, with the film's troubled bodies, heavy with dream and guilt, wading through a lurid quagmire of deflected memory. The nightmarish atmosphere is offset by such hypercinematic gestures as warp-speed transitions between Dutch and Israeli locales or battleground overviews higher than any crane shot, steadier than any helicopter pan. In line with the developing ironies of psychic artifice in the film, these effects aren't just associated with surrogate visual memories; they are surrogate cinema.

Twenty-five years after serving as a teenager in the Israeli army during the early 1980s occupation of Beirut, a middle-aged director sets out to discover why he has so completely blocked the memory of a notorious massacre of Arab civilians carried out by Israeli allies, the Christian Phalangists, in reprisal against the assassination of the newly elected Lebanese President Bashir Gemayel. Only later in the film does a friend suggest that the director, Folman, must have distanced his role in this whole operation from the start, since policing the Palestinian camps, let alone facilitating a mass extermination, would have been intolerable for a child of Auschwitz survivors to reflect upon. Rather than see himself as a Nazi, he took refuge in illusion.

*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3, pps 58–62, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.63.3.58

But his private mirages are hard to sort out from the toxic phantasmagoria of combat, which, according to Folman, assaults the mind like "a bad acid trip." Right from the start, the film's palette is eerily acidic. The animators have found just the right sulfuric glow for the delirium. With a gangrene orange saturating one bombed-out urban wasteland after another like a stain rather than a hue, bodies flow past in their fragile animation as if struggling to keep life in their limbs. And in contrast to the ravaged, infernal canvas of metropolitan Beirut, we get the occasional beachside or sylvan respite exploded by violence. In one of the most mordantly gorgeous episodes, we look on at a sun-pierced forest ambush in which, with a web of shadows turning Israeli uniforms into a balletic animated camouflage, a pre-teen Arab boy comes out of hiding to fire a rocket grenade straight through our line of sight into an approaching tank.

In a film about scrambled memories painfully drawn out of hiding, Folman's narrative is especially difficult to remember in the exact order of its realist flashbacks and its delusional cover stories. As a psychic topography, it amounts less to an autobiographical through-line than to the layering of a collective unconscious. The surreal opening nightmare of ravening dogs unleashed on an Israeli street sets the pattern for subsequent flashbacks sprung from the separate monologues of other former soldiers. The friend who tells the director of this first recurrent dream explains how he was too green a recruit to be trusted with killing enemy combatants, so he was assigned instead to the shooting of dozens of dogs to prevent their warning yelps. Plunging us unprepared into the gruesome nightmare that haunts him years later, the film thus begins in anticipation of its own dead end: a howling revenge for the slain that will later, when fantasy has been scoured away, emerge as an accusatory human chorus of mourners.

In the next interview, we see in flashback another friend's escape from seasickness into the absurdist vision of a giant naked woman on whose breast, maternal and erotic at once, he floats off while the rest of the crew is bombed. Based on secondhand reports like this, the climactic revelation for the Folman character is that a languid swimming episode in the pre-dawn, flare-lit sea, his one recurrent flashback, is a defensive fiction as anesthetizing and desolate as it looks. This is the spectral leitmotif that erupts at three separate points, less often than one might remember, and not with the echoing of

a charm but as its own sequenced exorcism. Neither of the two friends rising naked with him from his remembered Mediterranean interlude, zombie-like but still armed, recalls the event at all. Locating him outside the circuit of killing in this alternate picture of male camaraderie, Folman's numbed skinny-dipping fantasy is of course as much a libidinal sublimation of carnal violence as is that other soldier's hallucination of sea-borne feminine salvage: each a regressive vision at once oceanic, laving, and amniotic—as well as an amphibious flight from the nightmare of all the boots on the ground. In this somnambulism of disengagement, Folman goes nightbathing with his buds while others conduct the bloodbath—only for him to remain, afterwards, quite at sea about the facts this fiction has kept submerged. Denaturalized further by the unnerving electronic score (Max Richter's accompanying music is entitled "The Haunted Ocean"), such are the condensations and displacements of the traumatic unconscious in the protective mind's eye.

These figurative means for keeping himself in the dark, his guilt at bay, stand in contrast to alternate visual mediations familiar in part from other recent war films and their ubiquitous digital replays of Mideast violence. Certainly every chance *Waltz with Bashir* gets, it throws the chromatic and somatic estrangement of its own animation effects into relief against the recessed treatment of other image technologies, regularly dropped back into black-and-white format so as to forefront the alternate intensity of the prevailing narrative mode. Like zones of grisaille monochrome cordoned off in oil painting, these include everything from an aerial surveillance monitor tracking a self-guided missile in the bombing of an Arab street, through black-and-white photos repeatedly pinned up in the background of separate interview sessions, to an abrupt detour into the exaggerated historical fidelity of pre-color treatment to animate a WWII anecdote about furloughs from the Russian front. Then, during Folman's own bleak leave in Haifa, there are alternating broadcast images of a political harangue and a rock video on a storefront's bank of TV monitors, all the screens blaring in their own anachronistic version of jittery black-and-white focus. These appear just before Folman passes a video arcade and sees, in full color this time, a *Desert Patrol* war game, exactly the garish digital simulation of combat pyrotechnics that the cautionary animation of his own film rejects.

The building impact of these embedded photomechanical and electronic mediations helps orient an extended filmic conceit about psychological blockage. When Folman consults a trauma specialist, she mentions another soldier who, being "an amateur photographer" before the Lebanon War, staved off the horror by the "dissociative" maneuver of seeing everything—through an "imaginary camera"—as a parade of merely "great scenes." At just this point in her monologue, we get a series of separate animated rectangles decelerated to a graphic novel's equivalent of cinematic freeze frames. Reverting to the single drawings that underlie the narrative's whole technique, these combat shots turn the postures of a continuous battlefield tension and ravage into instantaneous poses. "Then one day the camera broke," says the psychologist in voiceover. Suddenly a dozen or so still shots rush by in a vertical file with sprocket noise accompanying the 35mm roll, as if serial record were clutching at filmic movement in the very throes of its dysfunction.

Indeed the psychiatrist's own terms have slipped, across a simile, from photography to moviegoing, for her patient "had used a mechanism to remain outside events, like watching a film" of the war rather than participating in it. Completing this photomechanical emblem, the last two frames of the broken roll don't just flutter past but settle into place to reveal moving images in their own right, one animated miniature screen on top of the other. Once the prophylactic "mechanism" has broken down, the perils of real time seem to be breaking through. Even the smallest increments of the track register an involuntary index of history in passing: the tattered banner at the Beirut Hippodrome flapping overhead to the left of each jammed, stacked frame. No matter how much the mind tries to lock down such disturbing pictures, their incrimination will return from the repressed, in this case precipitating a long panning shot across a circus of horror strewn with the bodies of slaughtered Arabian horses—until we close on the convex blur of a fly-swarmed eye, where an anonymous soldier sees his own reflection in death's brute anamorphosis.

This pitiable instance of shot and reverse shot in the same organic lens points straight through—along a similar ocular axis—to the exchanged points of view at the film's close. On the way there, and to complete the motif of the dead eye, we hear of a hellish urban hinterland known as the "Slaughterhouse," where everything is "like an LSD trip," including the spectacle this time of human rather than equine Arab bodies viciously desecrated, their organs and limbs exchanged in macabre triumph. No sooner is this memory dispatched on the soundtrack by another interviewed soldier than we see, sped past as if in revulsion by the camera itself, the gouged-out retinal globe and optic nerves of a swollen eyeball in a formaldehyde jar.

Following this monstrous flashback, the final interview with a renowned TV journalist, who was formerly there on the scene in Lebanon, summons the image of his cameraman crawling along the ground in front of him to keep

Outer and inner mediation

*Waltz with Bashir*. © 2008 Bridgit Folman Film Gang, Les Films d'Ici, Razor Film Produktion, Arte France and Noga Communications–Channel 8. DVD: Artificial Eye (U.K.).

beneath the line of fire. With "women, children, and old people" crowding the high-rise balconies, the seasoned reporter was stunned to see them watch the gun battle raging around him in real time "as if it were a film." But when the kind of video footage his crew was actually there to record is shown to us at the end, it seizes attention with the disjunctive force not of recovered documentation but of unmediated recall. Here is on-site video retrieved from the vaults—but no longer the tomb—of memory and made present, as if in its original sighting, to Folman himself at last. Burst through the labors of animated reconstruction is the true archive of terror—and the final trope of recognition. You had to have been there. The trouble is that Folman was—and must now take up the video image by proxy as his own admitted view.

To earn its culminating disclosure, *Waltz with Bashir* must of course dismantle the screen memory of those naked swimmers safely adjourned from the murders and all but drowning out their guilt under cover of darkness. In each repetition of this shielding fantasy so far, the three men return to the morning streets still buttoning up their fatigues, with the Folman character leading them straight toward us in close-up. At that point, however, alone in the frame, he turns a corner past posters of Bashir and finds his line of motion slowed by a procession of grieving women in pantomime, their wails symptomatically dialed out by the electronic score.

Fantasy vs. eyewitness

*Waltz with Bashir.* © 2008 Bridgit Folman Film Gang, Les Films d'Ici, Razor Film Produktion, Arte France and Noga Communications–Channel 8. DVD: Artificial Eye (U.K.).

Though in reverse directions, paths visibly intersect. He is already in the thick of things. But this isn't "factual" either, any more than was his enervated idyll in the sea, from whose false dawn he must awake. Both the lulling retreat, bracketed off from political reality, and his return to the fray in the aftermath of violence are linked cover stories. The actual reality lies between, rests indeed on a more candid marking—and impossible bridging—of the admitted *distance* between: a distance more rigorously acknowledged at last, even while being visually traversed in the closing camera movement. What memory has involuntarily spliced together of this sundered experience until then—the defensive sea dream and the terror that still infiltrates it—is their final disjunction, where Folman must recognize himself not immersed in suffering but confronted by it from his own official if rapidly vanishing distance.

Folman knows now that he was always present at the atrocities, but only on the outskirts, standing guard with fellow Israeli soldiers at the perimeter of the camps, *looking the other way* during the orgy of executions. With the beach fantasy shattered, its closing interpenetration of on-duty soldier and the inexorable tread of Arab grief is replayed finally at the truer remove of his disengaged complicity: that of an emotionally detached onlooker forced finally to see—and, by suddenly direct sound, to hear. On the brink of recovered memory, he is separated now across the gulf of a rapidly telescoped long

shot. Animation again generates a hypercinematic effect, a preternatural tracking shot burrowing through the train of bereft women with more precision than any Steadicam, closing by its own force the distance between their virtual funeral march and Folman's sentinel duty in the distance. The intervening and despoiled no-man's-land, previously elided in the dream's commingling of Folman and the suffering woman, here yawns between them to mark the breached gap—across time as well as space—between a censored private vision and the returned look of mass grief.

Closing upon the formerly glazed eyes of denial, the pinioning camera bores in on a prolonged close-up of Folman in his emerging awareness—until the abrupt reverse shot seems to echo and complete, in an analogous vector, the early assault of the Arab rocket in our direct line of sight. By this point, however, it is any remaining screen of fantasy that is exploded on contact with the approaching spectacle of pain. Overtly yanking him back to the aftermath of slaughter as it actually transpired, we see as if through his eyes a montage of 1982 documentary images of bereavement, then death itself. There is nothing knee-jerk in the resulting spasm of ocular recoil. The shock is knowingly twofold—and first of all in its visual letdown. Until now we've never seen screen images like *Waltz with Bashir*'s, whereas we've seen all too much Mideast affliction on TV. Throwing us back on the too familiar, the sudden visual privation is as barren as it appears.

But in no way facile or anodyne. There is no formal capitulation to routine verité, as some viewers have objected, in this plummet through a hyperbolic, computer-assisted imaginary to the analogue real; nothing pat about the 180-degree turn from show-stopping graphics to a straightforward graphic violence. After all the animated soul-searching close-ups, there must, at any aesthetic cost, be real faces looking back. And a fact faced—no longer masked or countenanced. After all the artful pains taken to picture the veils of repression, the actual pain: real mourners and—following that final sound video—real corpses as if beginning to disintegrate in an even grainier file of soundless and nearly still frames, none of them "great" shots at all, let alone photographic buffers against the event. After the screams of grief, its cause: absolute final silence. After so much animation, and our gradual acclimation to its spooky allure, its opposite in rank death.

We don't know for sure who took these documentary images, if or when they were ever broadcast, whether or not they correspond to what Folman was positioned to see on the scene. All we know is that, in the mental recognition they emblemize by the initial eyeline match of this distended reverse shot, the agonies they index are now meant to be, as they once weren't, felt. By their insistence—over against an animated image to whose mode of visualization we never return—the Folman figure has been taken finally, and the film with him, beyond the cartoon world of his deferred witness and the earlier phantasms of his self-deceit. In a jolt to our vision as well, a decisive shock of recognition, past atrocity is rerun as full-frame recall.

Screen memory gets erased from within by video trace. But the pivotal wrench of transition has been dialectical rather than reductive, let alone cathartic. Documentation dislodging fantasy turns fantasy itself into a document of disavowal, the superseding archival footage into a ghostly apparition—as much a haunting by history as its straightforward record. Though cut loose from actuality over the course of the film, an unconscious screening-out of one's guilt is no less true than the archived bloodshed and anguish it papers over with the desperately etched imagery of denial. The retreat to virtuality (and its techniques of animation) is therefore as much a record of the ordeal, in its psychic response, as is the video transcript of flailing misery. Together they are the truth of trauma, spelled out as such only in optical collision—and searing aural overlap—in these final moments, whose dialectical clash pictures each in the other's terms.

Prerecorded human sounds, mostly articulate voices, have anchored the film's recovered memories throughout, though usually suspended in the episodes of hallucination. In the last sequence, the keening grief of the approaching women is on the track (for the first time in this third iteration of their image) well before we enter the assailed vision and audition of the hero, switching there from painted frames to the recorded source of the wails in live-action despair. After all those webcam and satellite transmits in other Mideast war films, those handheld or unmanned captures that keep death at arm's or armament's length, after all that contemporary "period style," here both ears and eyes are opened to a moral abyss that still cannot be mastered, neither faced down nor fully faced up to, but which remains all the more blistering for the images previously arisen to repress it. Less an unflinching acknowledgment than a residual hauntedness, the act of mourning that now swallows up the film is its own. The narrative reversion from drawing to automatic record has come with a cinematic suture from which no healing is to be had.

[1] See my essay "Digital Fatigue: Imaging War in Recent American Cinema," *Film Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (summer 2009), 45–55.

GARRETT STEWART is James O. Freedman Professor of Letters at the University of Iowa.

DVD DATA *Waltz with Bashir.* Director: Ari Folman. © 2008 Bridgit Folman Film Gang, Les Films d'Ici, Razor Film Produktion, Arte France, Noga Communications – Channel 8. Publisher: Sony Pictures Classics. $28.96, 1 disc.

# COSTING *PLANET EARTH*

In November 2006, the BBC began to air a three-part companion piece to the nature documentary *Planet Earth*, which had been enormously successful earlier in the year. Its title was *Planet Earth: The Future*, and it was designed to satisfy some environmentalists who had criticized the series for underplaying or even ignoring the precarious state of the world's wilderness and wildlife. Aside from a collection of interviews and scattered clips of scientists or conservationists at work, there was no new footage produced for *The Future*. The series' narrator, David Attenborough, who has been the face and especially the voice of British naturalism for almost half a century, appears only briefly. Instead we get Simon Poland, an obscure actor who once played a preacher in *Children of Men*. When Americans rent the DVD boxed set of *Planet Earth*, which they do in very high numbers, many do not watch *The Future*.

But it is in *The Future* that *Planet Earth* articulates itself most clearly. Like most television nature documentaries, *Planet Earth* is pro-nature, pro-conservation, pro-*awareness*: "Surely an aware society can learn to live sustainably," Poland says early on. In the last half-century, nature films have shared Poland's hope, and they have developed both narrative and aesthetic means of communicating their support, of raising awareness. It would not be enough to make viewers aware of nature as an inert fact, of course; nature, in nature films, must be invested with meaning. In one way or another, it has to be made valuable. That is the whole point.

The BBC spent £16 million on *Planet Earth*, making it the most expensive documentary in the corporation's history. It was filmed by the in-house Natural History Unit in HD, and its whole appeal is widescreen visual splendor, from the shimmering flocks of birds that fill the screen like people in a Gursky photograph to the tight, super-slow-motion shots of mammals on the move. "Fifteen years ago," Poland says in *The Future*, "saiga antelope were filmed in their millions on the central Asian Steppes for another BBC series . . . the *Planet Earth* team wanted to film it again." A cameraman from the earlier show reminisces: "We came up over this slight rise, and as we came over the top, there was literally just a brown band"—that's the saiga, migrating—"from horizon to horizon." The expensively outfitted crews working for *Planet Earth* looked forward to the same thing, but instead they learned harsh lessons about the speed with which animal populations can be wiped out. "To their horror," Poland says of the filmmakers arriving on the Steppes, "the spectacle was gone. In the past fifteen years, poachers in central Asia have reduced this huge population to nearly nothing. No more spectacle." Delivering this final line, his tone is mournful.

No more spectacle. Again and again, *Planet Earth* laments the disappearance not of animals, but of animals as visual entertainment. In "Shallow Seas," the episode which aired immediately before the first installment of *The Future*, Attenborough spoke up for humpback whales by remarking that because fish and krill stocks are being depleted so rapidly, "spectacles like this may soon be part of history." At some point all nature films, either explicitly or implicitly, answer the question, "What is nature good for? What is it worth?" The answer given by *Planet Earth*, over the course of its eleven episodes, is: "Nature is good for looking at." This makes for excellent television but questionable environmental advocacy.

⁂

Films about animals and the natural world are as old as the medium itself, but it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that the genre began to take on what are now its familiar shapes. One early strain of nature film involved humans feeding animals. *Feeding the Sea Gulls* first appeared in theaters in 1898, followed by *Feeding the Pigeons* in 1899 and *Feeding the Sea Lions* in 1900. 1903 produced *Feeding the Elephants*, *Feeding the Hippopotamus*, and also *Feeding the Russian Bear*. This relatively benign (if not especially "wild") kind of film had its counterpart, however, in the staged confrontations between animals that became popular at exactly the same time: *Fighting Roosters* (1898), for example, or the inter-species *Fight Between Tarantula and Scorpion* (1900). The violence depicted in these early films was vivid and ugly. Derek Bousé, whose *Wildlife Films* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000) is one of a very small number of book-length studies of the genre, describes *Terrier vs. Wildcat* (1906) as "a particularly grisly piece of animal pornography in which a common housecat is tortured mercilessly for the camera" (45). In 1903, a Coney Island show elephant named Topsy killed one of its handlers and was "sentenced" to death. Topsy was brought to Luna Park and electrocuted in front of a paying audience.

*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3, pps 63–66, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.63.3.063

Thomas Edison was there with a camera, and soon released *Electrocuting the Elephant.*

These competing impulses—caring for and feeding the animals versus watching them kill each other—still tug back and forth in nature films, and in *Planet Earth* they make some basic facts of animal life hard to interpret. The show never settles, for example, on a coherent way of responding to predation. Sometimes it is a malevolent act; at other times, it serves as an outlet for the expression of animal playfulness and joy. In the series' first episode, "From Pole to Pole," caribou migrating across the tundra are suddenly imperiled by the arrival of wolves. Attenborough pronounces the word with a menacing undertone, pausing slightly before making their intentions clear: "And they're hungry." A spectacular chase ensues, the wolf gets hold of a calf, and the scene ends, with everyone feeling that the world is a more dangerous place.

In "Shallow Seas," however, predation turns into something entirely different. As a group of dusky dolphins herd and then eat a large shoal of fish, George Fenton's lush, expansively orchestrated soundtrack introduces a galloping theme in a major key. As dolphins rush into the glittering shoal, mouths open, flourishes in the wind section highlight the demise of each little fish.

Find a calculator and add it up: the second scene is a record of horrifying violence in high numbers, hundreds of lives snuffed out in a few minutes, while the first scene only records a single death. The difference is visual. While there is a certain far-off grace to the arctic chase scene, the ending is an aesthetic downer, with all the tearing, muscular contraction, and awkwardness that will be familiar to anyone who has eaten a tough steak. The undersea massacre, though, with its iridescent ball of victim fish, is a visual delight. This is how *Planet Earth* calibrates its moral universe. It grants moral approval to attractive events. It equates ethics and aesthetics.

In each episode of *Planet Earth*, the nearly autistic pursuit of visual spectacle is framed by and filtered through a set of narrative conventions that have been maturing and evolving throughout the twentieth century. In the decades preceding World War II, film technology improved radically, making it possible for wildlife filmmakers to actually begin taking their cameras into the wild. In 1923, the famous "adventurer-photographers" Martin and Osa Johnson released *Trailing African Wild Animals*, a film which had been financed by the sale of Martin's father's jewelry store, according to Gregg Mitman in *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film* (Harvard University Press, 1999). The film was prominently billed as "completely natural." Carl Akeley, then the country's foremost expert on African wildlife, signed a testimonial assuring audiences that the Johnsons' film was "free from misleading titles, staging, misinterpretation, or any form of faking or sensationalism" (29). This conceit is problematic in all the obvious ways—is it still "completely natural" if two partially filmed hunts have been edited into a single whole?—but it has remained an important element of nature films. When Attenborough talks about behaviors that have not previously been filmed "in the wild," he is referring not only to a place but to a particular state of filmic imagination.

If the Johnsons helped provide the setting for nature films, it was a substantially more famous filmmaker who gave the genre its narrative templates. In this area, Derek Bousé has already done most of the work (Scott MacDonald has also made valuable contributions to the literature). Bousé argues that Walt Disney's *True Life Adventures* series of nature programs, which were produced between 1948 and 1960, gathered up and synthesized different strands of wildlife filmmaking into a more or less unified whole. The series managed to retain the safari feel of the Johnsons, the scientific and educational aspects of Thomas Edison's efforts—*Electrocuting the Elephant* wasn't his only contribution to the genre—and the face-offs promised by films like *Fight Between Tarantula and Scorpion* by fitting them all into the narrative forms of classical Hollywood. This, Bousé writes, was Disney's real achievement: "the revelation that moving images of wild animals could be thoroughly integrated with narrative conventions from mainstream Hollywood films" (68).

The Johnsons' push into the wilderness continues today, and *Planet Earth* is a terminal version of their exploring impulse. Attenborough opens the series with a monologue that outlines just how far his show goes: "A hundred years ago, there were one and a half billion people on earth. Now, over six billion crowd our fragile planet. Still, there are places barely touched by humanity . . . This series will take you to the last wildernesses." *The last wildernesses.* It is a version of nature that is halfway between reality and myth, and drifting further every day into the latter. It sounds like *The Last of the Mohicans*, and in fact there are a number of harmonious resonances between today's declining nature and the nineteenth century's disappearing tribes. In the middle decades of that century, with Native American tribes across the continent succumbing to the policies of Andrew Jackson, a number of painters set out West. One of them was George Catlin, whose vivid, colorful, dignified portraits of Plains Native Americans remain museum favorites. In the opening pages of *North American Indians: Being Letters and Notes on Their Manners, Customs and Conditions* from 1841 (BiblioBazaar, 2008), Catlin provided a kind of mission statement for his project: "I have, for many years past, contemplated the noble races of

Savage dolphins, screensaver desert
© 2006 BBC Worldwide Ltd MCPS. DVD: BBC Warner.

red men who are now spread over these trackless forests and boundless prairies, melting away at the approach of civilisation. Their rights invaded, their morals corrupted, their lands wrested from them, their customs changed, and therefore lost to the world" (17). His indignation is palpable, but in the following sentence he modulates his project in an unexpected way: "I have flown to their rescue—not of their lives or of their race (for they are '*doomed*' and must perish), but to the rescue of their looks and modes."

*Planet Earth* would never go so far as to describe nature as "doomed," but it gives a similar impression of having flown to the rescue of nature's "looks." In some episodes, it can seem as though a majority of shots have been taken in either slow motion or with the use of time-lapse photography. In particularly quick scenes of violence, the filmmakers slow down the action to one fortieth the speed of real time, as with a great white shark leaping out of the water to eat a seal in "Shallow Seas," or crocodiles lunging up on shore to snap at wildebeests in "Fresh Water." (The latter is so slow that it looks like a Natural History Museum diorama set gently adrift.) Time-lapse is used to lend motion to plants, fungi, and the clouds which drift by behind desert rock formations. Shots of all kinds, at all speeds, are filled with colors of an almost otherworldly intensity. In "Pole to Pole," aerial shots of Africa's Kalahari Desert, streaked with green after the onset of seasonal flood waters, look more like semi-abstract desktop screensavers than views of the natural, inhabitable world.

These visual effects are not wedded to any distinctive or coherent set of stylistic imperatives—formally, the series resembles nothing so much as an airport postcard rack—but their accumulation eventually prompts the viewer into asking what kind of world is being represented on the screen. For a series about humanity's home, *Planet Earth* spends a lot of time defamiliarizing its subjects. In one episode, "Deserts," a series of odd sand depressions—which would have been perfectly strange all on their own—are distorted even further by the use of a fish-eye lens, which turns the scene nearly psychedelic; "i like adding ganja to the equation," one fan wrote on the series' Facebook page, as reported by Alex Williams in "'Planet Earth' Rocks (or Even Waltzes). You Pick" (*The New York Times*, April 17, 2009). It makes perfect sense.

No doubt this aesthetic was chosen primarily in order to dazzle television and DVD viewers, but it also adds a new wrinkle to the wilderness-oriented goals of nature filmmakers. *Planet Earth*'s time-lapse photography, extreme slow motion, and distorting lens effects push out toward an aesthetic and psychic wilderness, transforming the series' literal (but still Earth-bound) landscapes into alien worlds. The appeal of the series to recreational drug users further suggests a link between the show's visuals and a stepping-outside of oneself.

⁘

The world represented in *Planet Earth* is not one that we inhabit. It is true that this is part of the show's premise—"This series will take you to the last wildernesses"—but its implications run further into the spheres of environmental activism and politics. The show does not simply depict uninhabited areas of the Earth; it depicts those areas in such a way as to block the formation of intellectual or conceptual links between them and the political and economic processes that continue to accelerate their degradation.

Again, it is in the series' tacked-on documentary supplement, *The Future*, that this repression of human politics becomes apparent. (It is also in *The Future* that politics will eventually return, in a weird way. More on that later.) In a brief interview immediately following Simon Poland's announcement that poachers had almost entirely wiped out central Asia's saiga antelope—"No more spectacle"—we hear Dr. E. J. Milner-Gulland, of Imperial College, London, explain the poachers' sudden appearance. She says that following the fall of the Soviet Union, the rural economies that sustained the peoples of central Asia broke down: "people had no source of food or income, and they started to hunt the

saigas. For the first time in seventy years, the border with China had opened, and the saiga's horns that the males have are used in traditional Chinese medicine, and they're very valuable. And obviously there was this massive market just waiting there . . . And within two or three years . . . the saiga population had collapsed."

Here, for just a minute or two, we comprehend the situation in all its geopolitical complexity. This is exactly the kind of problem that will have to be addressed if the destruction of the planet is to be even slowed, much less reversed. But after a quick look at this fascinating set of circumstances, *Planet Earth* shoves politics back into the wings. "So for their spectacular migration shots," Poland says, "the team had to go east, into a complete wilderness area." They filmed Mongolian gazelles instead, one spectacle being as good as any other.

The proof lies in the series' success. Warner Home Video has shipped more than three million copies of the five-DVD *Planet Earth* boxed set since its release in April of 2007, according to Williams in *The New York Times*, more than any other documentary ever. But visual splendor is a poor index of the health of Earth's ecosystems. "It may be worth noting," Bousé writes, "that during the very period of wildlife films' ascendancy on television . . . the state of wildlife and the natural world has, by most measures, worsened alarmingly" (xiv). While the filmmakers at the BBC's Natural History Unit are not the Earth's keepers, it is hard to imagine that producers and directors of nature documentaries would be completely unconcerned by this fact. Films like *Planet Earth* are the public face of western efforts on behalf of the environment. David Attenborough says as much in *The Future*. It is worth asking what kind of environmentalism they reveal.

In film, no visual delight comes without a price tag, and viewers of *Planet Earth* are almost certain to have heard or read about the expense involved in producing the series. The money is a central part of the show's own marketing and self-mythologizing strategies. But even if viewers had managed to avoid this information, it seems impossible that, as people familiar with the conventions and legends of Hollywood films, they could fail to be impressed by just how expensive the images look. The connection between money and aesthetics is not a contingent one in *Planet Earth*. There are filmic aesthetics—involving handheld cameras, say, or grainy footage—that suggest beauty attained through more modest financial means. But that is not the kind of beauty on display in *Planet Earth*. Its aerial shots, camera tricks, and extremist color palette belong to an aesthetic that signifies—in and of itself—a large cost. *Planet Earth* brings the plight of nature to its audience's attention through—both literally and figuratively—expensive lenses.

The alignment of environmental politics and large-scale capitalist enterprise, which lies at the center of *Planet Earth*'s appeal, is one of the last decade's most counter-intuitive developments. There is little argument that industrial capitalism is the single greatest cause of the environment's decline, and yet recent years have seen the emergence of the idea—in a wide range of political and media forums—that industrial capitalism is what will ultimately come to the planet's rescue. Last year, John Mackey, the CEO of Whole Foods, released an inspirational CD set titled *Passion and Purpose: The Power of Conscious Capitalism*, and argued that businesses need to discover the "deeper purpose" that grounds the pursuit of profits. Eight months later, *The New York Times* (December 6, 2009) ran an editorial by Jared Diamond—author of *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (W. W. Norton, 1997)—which asked, "Will Big Business Save the Earth?" and answered, "Yes."

This has most visibly taken the form of "green" consumer products like Toyota's hybrid Prius or Timberland's Earthkeepers line of boots, but the reverse—the corporatization of environmental discourse—is also taking place. The moneyed aesthetic of *Planet Earth* is a visual incarnation of what becomes verbally explicit in *The Future*. In the miniseries' third part, the primatologist Russell A. Mittermeier credits nature with providing "ecosystem services for the planet," and a number of talking heads quickly line up to echo his rhetoric. The Harvard biologist E. O. Wilson cites economists who have estimated that the services provided by nature are equal to $30 trillion. A little later, the eco-bureaucrat Jonathon Porritt says that "our entire productive food enterprise is being subsidized by nature," and thus completes the transformation of natural processes into corporate ones.

It remains an open question whether this reconceptualization of the planet's ecosystems as providers of "goods and services" will be an effective one from the perspective of environmental advocacy. Capitalism, after all, has been assigning dollar values to the natural world from the very beginning. The corporatization of environmental discourse appears not as some kind of reversal, but as yet another step in the advance of capitalist ideology. Environmentalists working in this vein should ask themselves: what if we build a machine that improves upon our forests' conversion of $CO_2$ into oxygen? Will that justify their destruction? Can nature be laid off?

RICHARD BECK's interview with David Simon appeared in the winter 2008–09 issue. He has also written for *Bookforum,* the *Boston Phoenix,* and *N+1*.

DVD DATA *Planet Earth.* Various directors. © 2006 BBC Worldwide Ltd MCPS. Publisher: BBC Warner, 2007. $79.98, 5 discs.

DAVID STERRITT

## *Otto Preminger: The Man Who Would Be King* by Foster Hirsch

## *The World and Its Double: The Life and Work of Otto Preminger* by Chris Fujiwara

Otto Preminger had a complex personality that affected every aspect of his career, giving it conflicted and even paradoxical dimensions. His everyday fits of red-faced, eye-popping rage, directed against major stars and minor technicians alike, contrasted strikingly with the self-possessed tone and nonjudgmental outlook of his films. He would shoot twenty takes to get the precise acting he wanted, but rarely minded if an equipment shadow marred the one he decided to use. While he shared Alfred Hitchcock's urge to preplan each picture in detail, he freely changed character positions and tracking-shot trajectories just before the camera rolled. He was a Hollywood professional with a fiercely independent streak, a nonreligious man who treasured his Jewish identity, an Old World traditionalist who earnestly tried (and generally failed) to master the fragmented, accelerated moods that swept through commercial cinema in the later years of his career.

With so much to think about, it's surprising that more hasn't been written about Preminger since his death in 1986, but the mystery is easily solved. Only one item in his filmography is almost universally acclaimed—the noir landmark *Laura*—and it premiered way back in 1944. Such intriguing pictures as *Bonjour tristesse* (1958), *Exodus* (1960), and *Bunny Lake Is Missing* (1965) divided critics when released and still leave many cold. The widely shared opinion of his late films, starting with *Hurry Sundown* in 1967, is that they range from embarrassingly bad to supernaturally awful. Preminger's pioneering work as an independent producer–director seems commonplace now that everyone's an indie, and his once-celebrated battles with Hollywood censors over impermissible words (mistress, virgin) and behaviors (addiction, homosexuality) sound quaint to modern moviegoers, especially in the context of films as well-behaved as *The Moon Is Blue* (1953), *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955), and *Advise & Consent* (1962). Also, some of his favorite narrative devices are less fashionable now than during his heyday—the courtroom scene, for instance, whose possibilities he explored in pictures as dramatically different as *Angel Face* (1952), *The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell* (1955), *Saint Joan* (1957), and *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959).

These factors may account for Preminger's neglect, but they don't justify the situation. So it's a particular pleasure to welcome two new critical biographies about his life, times, work, and personality. Each is energetically written and extensively researched, and each blends abundant factual information with lively opinions about individual films and engaging ideas about Preminger's contributions to the Hollywood of his day. Where the books differ is less in the landscape they explore than in the specifics they find most absorbing. *Otto Preminger: The Man Who Would Be King*, by film and theater scholar Foster Hirsch, takes advantage of its greater length to serve up more biographical detail, while *The World and Its Double: The Life and Work of Otto Preminger*, by critic and editor Chris Fujiwara, puts more of its energy into analysis and interpretation.

Together the books strongly reaffirm Preminger's importance to modern film, and I was interested to see them accomplish this in ways that connect intelligently and organically to the best Preminger criticism of bygone years. I'm thinking particularly of Andrew Sarris's assessment in his 1968 book, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929–1968*, where he places Preminger in the second-highest rank of Hollywood auteurs ("The Far Side of Paradise") and describes him as "a director who sees all problems and issues as a single-take two-shot, the stylistic expression of the eternal conflict, not between right and wrong, but between the right-wrong on one side and the right-wrong on the other, a representation of the right-wrong in all of us as our share of the human condition. In the middle of the conflict stands Otto Preminger, right-wrong, good-bad, and probably sincere-cynical." Although neither Hirsch nor Fujiwara cites this illuminating passage (or the related mise-en-scène theories of André Bazin in the 1950s and various *Movie* writers in the 1960s), many of their discussions can be taken as extensions and elaborations of its insights.

Both of the new books are auteurist enterprises, and Preminger presents a challenge for that approach, since (like the equally protean Howard Hawks) he worked in numerous genres at assorted studios with a varied lot of stars, collaborators, and degrees of creative freedom. Viewed from a different angle, though, he is (again like Hawks) a poster boy for auteurism, using elements of style—including his well-known lengthy takes, framing two or more figures against value-neutral backgrounds, rarely privileging one character above another—to achieve a sense of emotional balance and intellectual evenhandedness not often found in the overheated

precincts of mass-audience cinema. Preminger started out as a stage director in his native Austria, and when he turned to film (with *The Great Love*, an Austrian melodrama, in 1931) he held onto his fascination with organizing multiple points of view inside a visual frame that allows equal weight and dignity to the characters, the performers who play them, and the spectators looking on.

This fundamental choice—to put theatrical and cinematic resources into dialogic play—helps explain Preminger's special gift for widescreen composition, starting with the CinemaScope Western *River of No Return* in 1954. Yet he saw even the most expansive screen as a site for psychological expressiveness rather than flashy spectacle. "What counts isn't the frame," he said, "it's what you put into it." Fujiwara quotes that remark (154) and offers a first-rate reexamination of Preminger's lengthy shots and virtuoso camera movements, using *Angel Face* to illustrate how he treats a film's implied narrator as an "embodied being," using long takes because the camera cannot "step outside itself . . . and occupy more than one place within a scene," and moving it to stress "the continuity and uniqueness of a point of view that, in order to take in . . . different areas, must move through space" (70–71). This is critical analysis at its perceptive best.

Preminger's personality was as famous as his films, and both of the new books have behind-the-scenes scuttlebutt to spare. Many anecdotes arise from his private life, which included three marriages and numerous affairs, but the most memorable ones—and the most stinging ones—relate to his filmmaking, where in addition to loyal friends he made a startling number of resentful enemies, as you can tell by some of the quotes in Hirsch's volume. Leon Uris, author of *Exodus*: "Otto was a terrorist—he's Arafat, a Nazi, Saddam Hussein—who never knew the difference between lying and not lying" (284). Tom Tryon, star of *The Cardinal* (1963): "I remember looking at him and I thought, 'Tom, that's the man who destroyed your life'" (383). Dorothy Dandridge, who was Preminger's lover while starring in *Carmen Jones* (1954) and also starred in *Porgy and Bess* (1959): "Otto was ugly. Truly ugly" (291). A still photographer who befriended Jean Seberg on the set of *Saint Joan*: "Often at the end of the day's shooting, she would be sobbing hysterically. Jean would be broken" (258). And more, both pro and con, plus backhanded encomiums like one by Otto's own brother, agent and producer Ingo Preminger, who reacted to Hirsch's interview request by saying, "He was a very good producer and fought important battles against censorship, but there was no great film!" (6). Like his compatriot Erich von Stroheim, who also had a furious temper under a shaved pate, Preminger was a man many loved to hate.

Hirsch and Fujiwara differ enough in their perspectives that both books are well worth reading. If you have to choose between them, you can get a hint of their priorities from their subtitles. *The Man Who Would Be King* signals Hirsch's greater emphasis on the interplay between Preminger's larger-than-life persona and the show-business world in which it operated. Fujiwara's more oblique subtitle, *The World and Its Double*, evokes two major modernist works—*The Theatre and Its Double*, published by radical theorist Antonin Artaud in 1938, and *Out One*, the 1974 epic by Jacques Rivette that takes place in "Paris and its double," a quintessentially cinematic realm where the concrete and the constructed, the real and the unreal, flow as one. Rivette was an early Preminger partisan in the 1950s, and linking Preminger's restless, questing cinema with the French filmmaker's avant-garde sensibility is a bold and original move on Fujiwara's part.

Neither book has an edge on lively opinions about the thirty-nine pictures Preminger directed and the handful (most notably Billy Wilder's 1953 *Stalag 17*) in which he acted, usually in a Nazi uniform. I agree with Hirsch that his most fluent and thoughtful films include *Laura*, *Angel Face*, *Anatomy of a Murder*, *Porgy and Bess*, *Bunny Lake Is Missing*, and *The Human Factor*, the resonant 1979 drama that rounded off Preminger's career (507). Fujiwara favors all-embracing movies like *Anatomy of a Murder*, *Exodus*, and *In Harm's Way* (1965), which allow one to say, "it's not just a film, it's a world" (421). I would add *The Man with the Golden Arm* and *Bonjour tristesse* to the honor roll, and I'm not so enthusiastic about the showy *Carmen Jones*, the endless *Exodus*, or the uneven *Advise & Consent* and *The Cardinal*. On the bottom end of the scale, I can't agree with Hirsch that the 1970 kookfest *Tell Me That You Love Me, Junie Moon* is "the only film in [Preminger's] entire career without a single redeeming feature" (450). Surely that honor goes to the leaden 1943 comedy *Margin for Error*, although Fujiwara finds the 1975 thriller *Rosebud* to be "without doubt the hardest of Preminger's films to defend" (406).

In any case, I enjoyed matching my judgments with those of such knowledgeable critics—and articulate ones, even if they occasionally lapse into gnarly or unpersuasive prose, as when Fujiwara explains the weakness of *Such Good Friends*, a 1971 flop I've always liked, by saying that "Preminger's instinct for representing the reality that the script is parodying prevents him from letting the parody be stronger than the reality (which it would have to be in order to be funny); to compensate (since he knows the film is supposed to be funny), he

directs the actors to announce that what they are doing is funny" (393). This is enjoyable in a Preston Sturges sort of way, but I disagree with it, because hey, the film *is* funny!

Beyond the distinctive qualities of these fine books, their one-two punch offers the strongest impetus in ages for a revival of interest in a gifted, mercurial, zealously independent producer–director who changed Hollywood's business model while crafting an impressive number of solid, sometimes brilliant pictures. It's a treat to read such vivid portraits of his stormy artistic personality and the surprisingly subtle creativity that it both masked and manifested. © 2010 David Sterritt

DAVID STERRITT is *Film Quarterly*'s Chief Book Critic, chair of the National Society of Film Critics, and author of *The Honeymooners* (Wayne State University Press, 2009).

BOOK DATA Chris Fujiwara, *The World and Its Double: The Life and Work of Otto Preminger*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2008. $35.00 cloth; $18.00 paper. 480 pages.

Foster Hirsch, *Otto Preminger: The Man Who Would Be King*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007. $35.00 cloth. 574 pages.

JOANNA E. RAPF

## *The Final Victim of the Blacklist: John Howard Lawson, Dean of the Hollywood Ten* by Gerald Horne

## *"Un-American" Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*, ed. Frank Krutnik, Steve Neale, Brian Neve, and Peter Stanfield

The resurgence of interest in the Hollywood blacklist years is hardly surprising in our politically turbulent post-9/11 era. Both these books are valuable additions to the rapidly growing scholarship on those years (roughly 1947–67). Of the two, I found "*Un-American*" *Hollywood* the more informative and engaging, while Gerald Horne's exhaustively researched study of the career of John Howard Lawson is somewhat hard to read because of its distracting documentation and jumbled chronology. Because this career is so varied and complex, *The Final Victim* would have been easier to follow had it included a timeline of Lawson's life, a chronological bibliography of his writings, including the plays, a filmography, and also a glossary of the many acronyms scattered throughout its pages.

Horne, a professor of History at the University of Houston, is a prolific author, having published almost a book a year since 2000, with several of them related to left-wing activity in Hollywood. He knows his material. But I wonder why he decided to write about Lawson since he does not seem to admire him very much. Horne calls Lawson's act of conscience to go to jail rather than to name names before the HUAC a "high-flown view" (197), and earlier he seems disdainful of Lawson's wealth, speaking of the writer's awareness of the rising tide of fascism as something seen "from his comfortable doorstep" (129). Horne's apparent skepticism about his subject is reflected in the strange way he describes many of Lawson's colleagues on the Left, such as "budding Red writer Alvah Bessie" (154), "the Communist screenwriter Michael Wilson" (155), "young Red Helen Slote Levitt" (155), "Carl Foreman the Communist" (134), or Walter Bernstein "the Communist writer" (213). This reminds me of how the 2008 presidential election used "Joe the Plumber" as a way of talking about people so that they become icons of ideology rather than unique, struggling human beings. Horne does this throughout his book and it is disturbing.

Lawson himself is described as "left-handed, short, big-nosed" and walking with a limp (21). Although these characteristics are accurate, Horne goes on to suggest that, "like the defective eye of novelist Alice Walker or the halting speech of the writer Budd Schulberg," they served to make Lawson feel "different," giving him "a sensitivity to humanity that often shone through in his fictional creations" (22). Yet Horne never reveals the nature of that sensitivity. Moreover, rather than giving us his own analysis and insights into Lawson's work, Horne relies on others' analyses of, for example, Lawson's critical writings such as *The Hidden Heritage* (1950) and *Film: The Creative Process* (1964). *The Final Victim*, in spite of its invaluable and thorough research, factual accounting, and profuse documentation, is lacking in the analysis that would reveal Lawson's significance as an astute writer about the creative process and the culture of his time. As an intellectual and a humanitarian, John Howard Lawson was more than the "Cultural Commissar" of the Hollywood Communist Party.

Just how much influence any filmmaker with a political point to make might have had on movies during the 1930s and 40s is explored in greater depth in "*Un-American*" *Hollywood*. This is a first-rate anthology with contributions by fourteen scholars deeply informed by their historical and archival research. Where the HUAC was unable to come up with convincing examples of subversion in Hollywood films, the thirteen essays in this book succeed, giving us a fresh perspective on Hollywood and television during the blacklist era and its legacy during the Vietnam years. The introduction by the editors cites "Red Hollywood," Thom Andersen's "seminal" (3) essay, reprinted with a new afterword at the end of the volume, as an inspiration. In 1985 Andersen asked for a more detailed look at the work of the blacklistees in the context of what he labeled "film gris," in contrast to the better known

directs the actors to announce that what they are doing is funny" (393). This is enjoyable in a Preston Sturges sort of way, but I disagree with it, because hey, the film *is* funny!

Beyond the distinctive qualities of these fine books, their one-two punch offers the strongest impetus in ages for a revival of interest in a gifted, mercurial, zealously independent producer–director who changed Hollywood's business model while crafting an impressive number of solid, sometimes brilliant pictures. It's a treat to read such vivid portraits of his stormy artistic personality and the surprisingly subtle creativity that it both masked and manifested. © 2010 David Sterritt

DAVID STERRITT is *Film Quarterly*'s Chief Book Critic, chair of the National Society of Film Critics, and author of *The Honeymooners* (Wayne State University Press, 2009).

BOOK DATA Chris Fujiwara, *The World and Its Double: The Life and Work of Otto Preminger*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2008. $35.00 cloth; $18.00 paper. 480 pages.

Foster Hirsch, *Otto Preminger: The Man Who Would Be King*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007. $35.00 cloth. 574 pages.

JOANNA E. RAPF

## *The Final Victim of the Blacklist: John Howard Lawson, Dean of the Hollywood Ten* by Gerald Horne

## *"Un-American" Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*, ed. Frank Krutnik, Steve Neale, Brian Neve, and Peter Stanfield

The resurgence of interest in the Hollywood blacklist years is hardly surprising in our politically turbulent post-9/11 era. Both these books are valuable additions to the rapidly growing scholarship on those years (roughly 1947–67). Of the two, I found "*Un-American*" *Hollywood* the more informative and engaging, while Gerald Horne's exhaustively researched study of the career of John Howard Lawson is somewhat hard to read because of its distracting documentation and jumbled chronology. Because this career is so varied and complex, *The Final Victim* would have been easier to follow had it included a timeline of Lawson's life, a chronological bibliography of his writings, including the plays, a filmography, and also a glossary of the many acronyms scattered throughout its pages.

Horne, a professor of History at the University of Houston, is a prolific author, having published almost a book a year since 2000, with several of them related to left-wing activity in Hollywood. He knows his material. But I wonder why he decided to write about Lawson since he does not seem to admire him very much. Horne calls Lawson's act of conscience to go to jail rather than to name names before the HUAC a "high-flown view" (197), and earlier he seems disdainful of Lawson's wealth, speaking of the writer's awareness of the rising tide of fascism as something seen "from his comfortable doorstep" (129). Horne's apparent skepticism about his subject is reflected in the strange way he describes many of Lawson's colleagues on the Left, such as "budding Red writer Alvah Bessie" (154), "the Communist screenwriter Michael Wilson" (155), "young Red Helen Slote Levitt" (155), "Carl Foreman the Communist" (134), or Walter Bernstein "the Communist writer" (213). This reminds me of how the 2008 presidential election used "Joe the Plumber" as a way of talking about people so that they become icons of ideology rather than unique, struggling human beings. Horne does this throughout his book and it is disturbing.

Lawson himself is described as "left-handed, short, big-nosed" and walking with a limp (21). Although these characteristics are accurate, Horne goes on to suggest that, "like the defective eye of novelist Alice Walker or the halting speech of the writer Budd Schulberg," they served to make Lawson feel "different," giving him "a sensitivity to humanity that often shone through in his fictional creations" (22). Yet Horne never reveals the nature of that sensitivity. Moreover, rather than giving us his own analysis and insights into Lawson's work, Horne relies on others' analyses of, for example, Lawson's critical writings such as *The Hidden Heritage* (1950) and *Film: The Creative Process* (1964). *The Final Victim*, in spite of its invaluable and thorough research, factual accounting, and profuse documentation, is lacking in the analysis that would reveal Lawson's significance as an astute writer about the creative process and the culture of his time. As an intellectual and a humanitarian, John Howard Lawson was more than the "Cultural Commissar" of the Hollywood Communist Party.

Just how much influence any filmmaker with a political point to make might have had on movies during the 1930s and 40s is explored in greater depth in "*Un-American*" *Hollywood*. This is a first-rate anthology with contributions by fourteen scholars deeply informed by their historical and archival research. Where the HUAC was unable to come up with convincing examples of subversion in Hollywood films, the thirteen essays in this book succeed, giving us a fresh perspective on Hollywood and television during the blacklist era and its legacy during the Vietnam years. The introduction by the editors cites "Red Hollywood," Thom Andersen's "seminal" (3) essay, reprinted with a new afterword at the end of the volume, as an inspiration. In 1985 Andersen asked for a more detailed look at the work of the blacklistees in the context of what he labeled "film gris," in contrast to the better known

film noir. Ironically Andersen reminds us that he has no particular attachment to the term or concept of "film gris," which was originally advanced in semi-jest, "playing on the stereotypical association of communism with drabness" (267). But it has become part of our critical vocabulary to talk about noir films in which social commentary dominates. Both the introduction and Andersen's two pieces give a remarkably thorough evaluation of the scholarship on the blacklist up to 2005, with particular emphasis on the work by Larry Ceplair, Steven Englund, Patrick McGilligan, Paul Buhle, and Dave Wagner, who laid groundwork for the research and insight contained in "*Un-American*" *Hollywood*.

The book contains several essays focused on specific films: Jeff Smith's on *The Robe* (1953) as political allegory, Erica Sheeen's on Edward Dmytryk's "lost" film of Italian American novelist Pietro di Conato's *Christ in Concrete* (1949), and Doug Dibbern's on Daniel Mainwaring and Joseph Losey's *The Lawless* (1950). Both Dibbern's and Sheen's essays bring to light neglected but resonant facts about largely forgotten post-war films, reminding us that the history we read in our texts only touches the surface complexity of actual events. Smith explores the question of intention versus interpretation with respect to *The Robe*. He gives a cogent and well-researched argument that Albert Maltz's intention in his early draft of the screenplay was to critique Italian Fascism and not American anti-Communism, but nonetheless, by looking at the film's historical context and reception (and Smith writes lucidly on reception theory) it is possible to read it allegorically with respect to the blacklist.

One of the most original and fascinating essays in the anthology is Frank Krutnik's on how Diego Rivera's painting of *The Flower Carrier* (1935) shows up in the mise-en-scène in five films between 1947–51. Originally given as a talk at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, I still remember it vividly because of its dramatic use of frame enlargments —reproduced here—to illustrate how this painting subtly, silently, but eloquently makes comments on class and gender, and serves as a coded signifier of silenced left-wing political affiliation.

Other essays, less unique but still significantly articulating aspects of the popular culture and politics of the post-war era, cover such topics as the boxing film (Peter Stanfield) and the use of jazz in crime films (Steve McCann). Will Straw and Rebecca Prime both address the subject of the semi-documentary. Straw has diligently read movie reviews from *The Daily Worker* between 1946–48 to look at the left-wing reception of some of these films, but Prime's essay on Jules Dassin's *The Naked City* (1948) may actually be more informative on the genre than Straw's.

Four blacklistees are covered individually in this anthology: Jules Dassin (Rebecca Prime), Adrian Scott (Jennifer Langdon-Teclaw), Albert Maltz (Art Simon), and Robert Rossen (Brian Neve). Both Prime and Langdon-Teclaw have done original interviews (Prime with Dassin before his death in March of 2008 and Langdon-Teclaw with Norma Barzman and Joan Scott) that supplement their thorough archival research. As Dibbern did with *The Lawless*, Prime shows how *The Naked City* was transformed from Dassin's original powerful vision of social commentary to a rather "innocuous Hollywood genre film" (142). Langdon-Teclaw's essay on Scott, unlike Horne's whole book on Lawson, compassionately takes us into the psychology of the man, how he found his true métier in producing, which meant the blacklist was particularly hard on him because he could not hide behind a front or a pseudonym. She focuses on two of his lesser-known films, *Cornered* (1945) and *So Well Remembered* (1946), which ironically is not well remembered.

"*Un-American*" *Hollywood* is particularly valuable for bringing to light the "unremembered." Brian Neve does this not by rehashing Robert Rossen's recantation and cooperation with the HUAC, but by looking at the way, as a writer and director, he was able to critique American business and political structures in his films before and after the war. Art Simon's inspiring discussion of the collaboration between Albert Maltz, Frank Sinatra, and Mervyn Leroy to make *The House I Live In* (1945) is an even more interesting illumination of a largely forgotten film. Maltz, who, like Lawson, was not just a screenwriter, but also a playwright, novelist, short-story writer, and pamphleteer, shared with Sinatra an active opposition to racism and bigotry. In some ways, Simon's essay actually tells us more about Sinatra than Maltz in describing the production of this remarkable ten-minute short that teaches brotherhood and tolerance of racial and ethnic difference to a gang of youths persecuting another, presumably for being Jewish. Simon gives us several interpretative strategies, but concludes, "a properly historicized reading of the film must recognize the urgency of its agenda, one that addressed the shadow cast by anti-Semitism over an America just coming out of the war" (179).

The last two essays in "*Un-American*" *Hollywood* take very different approaches to the subject of politics and film. Steve Neale lays out some of his groundbreaking research on the contributions of blacklisted writers to some of the popular TV costume dramas of the 1950s, such as *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and *The Adventures of Sir Lancelot*. I remember

watching these series intently, especially since, even as a youngster, I knew who really wrote them under pseudonyms, including my father (Maurice Rapf) and many of his blacklisted friends. So it was a special pleasure to read their names in print as the actual writers, along with the names they used as "fronts." Through painstaking research (there is still more to be done) Neale has been able to draw up a reasonably complete picture of who wrote which episode under what name. This is invaluable spadework, factual information that hopefully will allow future scholars to do what Neale has not yet done here, and that is to look at the social content of the series and how the contributions of these blacklisted writers may have reflected their personal ideologies.

Finally Mark Shiel brings the legacy of the blacklist into the 1960s with *FTA* ("Fuck the Army" or "Free the Army"), an anti-war roadshow that included Jane Fonda and Donald Sutherland. The film they made of their experience is partly a documentary record of the show, but also a study of the dissenting GI and of the war itself. Its direct connection to the political activity and films explored elsewhere in this anthology is that Sutherland reads from Dalton Trumbo's powerful anti-war novel, *Johnny Got His Gun*, and that *FTA* too has largely disappeared from exhibition and film history, illustrating that the suppression of left-wing political ideology did not end with the blacklist.

There is an unspoken subtext to all the writing here, a lingering shadow that reflects on our country today with its ongoing fear of people who might be "un-American." The editors themselves recognize the timeliness of their work, commenting on the parallel between the post-9/11 culture of repression and that of the early Cold War era (17). It is commonplace to say that we need to remember the dark days of our history so that we don't repeat it. Reading this book from cover to cover and also Gerald Horne's painstaking study of John Howard Lawson is a valuable experience not just of discovery and knowing, but of remembering. © 2010 Joanna E. Rapf

JOANNA E. RAPF is a professor of English and Film and Video Studies at the University of Oklahoma.

BOOK DATA Gerald Horne, *The Final Victim of the Blacklist: John Howard Lawson, Dean of the Hollywood Ten.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. $60.00 cloth; $25.95 paper. 360 pages.

Frank Krutnik, Steve Neale, Brian Neve, Peter Stanfield (eds), *"Un-American" Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007. $75.00 cloth; $27.95 paper. 362 pages.

MARTIN FRADLEY

## *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* ed. Daniel Bernardi

## *Cinematic Identity: Anatomy of a Problem Film* by Cindy Patton

Since the publication of Richard Dyer's *White* (Routledge, 1997), studies of cinematic depictions of whiteness have become integral to debates about the representation of race and ethnicity in popular film. Daniel Bernardi's edited collection, *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* follows his previous historically focused anthologies, *The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of U.S. Cinema* (Rutgers University Press, 1996) and *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), to make a broad trilogy on the subject. Bernardi's introduction is succinct and forceful in outlining "the escapist ideology of Hollywood realism" and emphasizing that "to talk or write about racism in [the United States] is to at least implicitly acknowledge white supremacy" (xvi). He connects the seemingly "harmless" pleasures of film entertainment and the "invisible" quality of whiteness. Both are much more powerful and insidious than they seem, strongly impacting society and culture: "while race and identity are often erroneously perceived as natural or divine, they are in fact historical and cultural processes fraught by oppression yet marked by resistance." And, by the same token, "we do not escape reality when watching cinema uncritically; we perpetuate real ideologies when we think of cinema as 'only the movies.' To question cinema—the central goal of this book and its contributors—is to resist ideology."

*The Persistence of Whiteness* is divided into five sections devoted in turn to genre, anthropomorphism (in science-fiction/fantasy films), bodies, interracial desire, and individual stars and directors. The opening section most successfully carries through the project outlined by the editor. Charles Ramírez Berg neatly summarizes schizophrenic and Anglocentric ideas of so-called manifest destiny through analysis of enduring national mythologies surrounding the Alamo as depicted in, among others, *Red River* (1948) and *The Alamo* (2004). Josh Stenger's lively and perceptive essay on America International Pictures' 1960s beach movies usefully explores the ways in which these salaciously promoted (but fundamentally prudish) exploitation teen flicks map race within and across the southern California landscape, the films' utopian youth-cultural sensibilities affirming a privileged, white

watching these series intently, especially since, even as a youngster, I knew who really wrote them under pseudonyms, including my father (Maurice Rapf) and many of his blacklisted friends. So it was a special pleasure to read their names in print as the actual writers, along with the names they used as "fronts." Through painstaking research (there is still more to be done) Neale has been able to draw up a reasonably complete picture of who wrote which episode under what name. This is invaluable spadework, factual information that hopefully will allow future scholars to do what Neale has not yet done here, and that is to look at the social content of the series and how the contributions of these blacklisted writers may have reflected their personal ideologies.

Finally Mark Shiel brings the legacy of the blacklist into the 1960s with *FTA* ("Fuck the Army" or "Free the Army"), an anti-war roadshow that included Jane Fonda and Donald Sutherland. The film they made of their experience is partly a documentary record of the show, but also a study of the dissenting GI and of the war itself. Its direct connection to the political activity and films explored elsewhere in this anthology is that Sutherland reads from Dalton Trumbo's powerful anti-war novel, *Johnny Got His Gun*, and that *FTA* too has largely disappeared from exhibition and film history, illustrating that the suppression of left-wing political ideology did not end with the blacklist.

There is an unspoken subtext to all the writing here, a lingering shadow that reflects on our country today with its ongoing fear of people who might be "un-American." The editors themselves recognize the timeliness of their work, commenting on the parallel between the post-9/11 culture of repression and that of the early Cold War era (17). It is commonplace to say that we need to remember the dark days of our history so that we don't repeat it. Reading this book from cover to cover and also Gerald Horne's painstaking study of John Howard Lawson is a valuable experience not just of discovery and knowing, but of remembering. © 2010 Joanna E. Rapf

JOANNA E. RAPF is a professor of English and Film and Video Studies at the University of Oklahoma.

BOOK DATA Gerald Horne, *The Final Victim of the Blacklist: John Howard Lawson, Dean of the Hollywood Ten.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. $60.00 cloth; $25.95 paper. 360 pages.

Frank Krutnik, Steve Neale, Brian Neve, Peter Stanfield (eds), *"Un-American" Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007. $75.00 cloth; $27.95 paper. 362 pages.

MARTIN FRADLEY

## *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* ed. Daniel Bernardi

## *Cinematic Identity: Anatomy of a Problem Film* by Cindy Patton

Since the publication of Richard Dyer's *White* (Routledge, 1997), studies of cinematic depictions of whiteness have become integral to debates about the representation of race and ethnicity in popular film. Daniel Bernardi's edited collection, *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* follows his previous historically focused anthologies, *The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of U.S. Cinema* (Rutgers University Press, 1996) and *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), to make a broad trilogy on the subject. Bernardi's introduction is succinct and forceful in outlining "the escapist ideology of Hollywood realism" and emphasizing that "to talk or write about racism in [the United States] is to at least implicitly acknowledge white supremacy" (xvi). He connects the seemingly "harmless" pleasures of film entertainment and the "invisible" quality of whiteness. Both are much more powerful and insidious than they seem, strongly impacting society and culture: "while race and identity are often erroneously perceived as natural or divine, they are in fact historical and cultural processes fraught by oppression yet marked by resistance." And, by the same token, "we do not escape reality when watching cinema uncritically; we perpetuate real ideologies when we think of cinema as 'only the movies.' To question cinema—the central goal of this book and its contributors—is to resist ideology."

*The Persistence of Whiteness* is divided into five sections devoted in turn to genre, anthropomorphism (in science-fiction/fantasy films), bodies, interracial desire, and individual stars and directors. The opening section most successfully carries through the project outlined by the editor. Charles Ramírez Berg neatly summarizes schizophrenic and Anglocentric ideas of so-called manifest destiny through analysis of enduring national mythologies surrounding the Alamo as depicted in, among others, *Red River* (1948) and *The Alamo* (2004). Josh Stenger's lively and perceptive essay on America International Pictures' 1960s beach movies usefully explores the ways in which these salaciously promoted (but fundamentally prudish) exploitation teen flicks map race within and across the southern California landscape, the films' utopian youth-cultural sensibilities affirming a privileged, white

middle class. Finally, Keith M. Harris's chapter offers a helpful summary of the strengths and limitations of the formative New Black Cinema of the late 1980s and early 90s, though readers may conclude that the author's lucid argument adds little to mid-90s critical debates about the work of Spike Lee and John Singleton.

Other sections are less consistent. While detailed essays on, respectively, the *Matrix* (1999–2003) and *Lord of the Rings* (2001–03) trilogies offer sophisticated and compelling readings of the films' contrasting racial politics, a rather idiosyncratic interrogation of the *Star Wars* franchise (1977–2005) only serves to underline how amenable George Lucas's fantasy worlds are to all kinds of fevered critical speculations and projections. (Indeed, one might argue that you can find a more incisive summary of the class and racial implications of *Star Wars* in the script for Kevin Smith's 1994 indie hit, *Clerks*.) In the "Blood and Bodies" section Priscilla Peña Ovalle adds to the growing corpus of scholarly writing about Jennifer Lopez's ambiguous embodiment of Latino/a identity, while Dale Hudson stresses the allegorical significance of recent vampire narratives vis-à-vis national anxieties over immigration and miscegenation. Disappointingly, however, an initially interesting contribution on the representation of the Jewish male body in *Sunshine* (2000) and *Enemy at the Gates* (2001) rapidly descends into a self-indulgent rallying cry for the "eroticization of the intellect" (164).

The final two sections in *The Persistence of Whiteness* also fluctuate in quality. Essays on interracial romance in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) and *Mandingo* (1975) offer intermittently useful commentary but nevertheless undermine the anthology's focus on recent cinema. (The same is true of Thomas Cripps's endearingly sprawling essay-cum-memoir on the influence of 1971's *Sweet Sweetback's Baadassss Song*.) Deborah Elizabeth Whaley's revisionist interpretation of Shakespearian adaptation *O* (2001) and Gina Marchetti's perceptive engagement with the titillating transnational erotics of *Romeo Must Die* (2000) offer more substantial rewards to the reader interested in recent developments in mainstream representation of cross-race desire. The concluding section focuses in more detail on individuals, both in front of and behind the camera. Bambi L. Haggins, author of the excellent *Laughing Mad: The Black Comic Persona in Post-Soul America* (Rutgers University Press, 2006) outlines the various ways in which the intelligent and oppositional take on race and gender contained in Whoopi Goldberg's stand-up comedy contrasts sharply with her politically safe (but commercially lucrative) performances in mainstream films such as *Ghost* (1990) and *Sister Act* (1992). In another fine contribution, Lester D. Friedman draws upon his monograph *Citizen Spielberg* (University of Illinois Press, 2006) to investigate the alleged racism and supposed literary infidelity of Spielberg's controversial 1985 adaptation of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, finding in the film's popular reception a mournful allegory of strained black–Jewish relations in the post-Civil Rights era. The last essay in the volume usefully condenses the insights of the anthology as a whole. Analyzing the hugely popular works conceived and directed by the Wayan brothers —*In Living Color* (1990–94), *Scary Movie* (2000), and *White Chicks* (2004)—Beretta E. Smith-Shomade examines the continuum between these irreverent comedies and the long tradition of black popular culture's interrogation of whiteness. Although sometimes lacking critical distance in its summation of the Wayans' output, the essay nevertheless rehabilitates an unfashionable subject with aplomb.

Cindy Patton's *Cinematic Identity: Anatomy of a Problem Film* is narrower in focus. Much like Judith E. Smith's recent *Visions of Belonging: Family Stories, Popular Culture, and Postwar Democracy, 1940–1960* (Columbia University Press, 2004), Patton's book examines the interaction between post-war liberalism, the democratic thrust of American popular culture, and broadly reconfigured notions of national identity and U.S. citizenship from the late 1940s through the 50s. Important to Patton's book is the contention that certain key "social problem" films of the post-war period—*Crossfire* (1947), *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947), *Home of the Brave* (1949), and, in particular, *Pinky* (1949)—helped to lay the groundwork for Civil Rights and other progressive movements. These didactic, liberal melodramas effectively encouraged white American audiences to empathize with the plight of oppressed groups. As the author puts it, somewhat opaquely, these films need to be understood "as especially powerful 'classrooms' for teaching (especially white Americans) how to apprehend Black personhood . . . and how to understand the possibilities that intersubjective movement between 'identities' might hold for mitigating the hazards of plurality in a male- and white- and Christian-dominated society" (11). Jargon notwithstanding, Patton persuasively demonstrates how these films addressed a new, post-war "empathetic citizen" (24) in a similar way to key literary works such as Arthur Miller's *Focus* (1945) and John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me* (1962). *Cinematic Identity* is most intriguing when the author explores the manner in which the cross-racial empathy—what Patton dubs "emotional miscegenation" (39)—was mirrored in the growing pre-eminence of on-screen Method acting, a process wherein "actors believed they broke past interpretation to the primal *experience* of emotion" (96).

*Pinky* was a flashpoint, engaging with with taboo subjects such as racial "passing" and interracial marriage. It caused a

furore and local authorities in Marshall, Texas attempted to censor it, on the grounds that the film would "incite racial conflict" (48), but the Supreme Court declared this unconstitutional. Yet this indication of a turning tide was not an unambiguous triumph and *Cinematic Identity* concludes on a somber note. Intimating that the emergence of identity politics may well have been as unhealthily divisive as it was politically necessary, Patton notes that Hollywood empathetic liberalism "allowed white viewers to avoid conceding *their* racism" by "recognizing Black people as repositories of rights without recognizing themselves as conduits of structural racism" (109). One only has to look to the self-congratulation evident in Paul Haggis's *Crash* (2004), a notable heir to the post-war problem films, to start to agree with the author's assertion that no matter how demonstratively it confesses, America still refuses to testify to the full reality of its racial history. © 2010 Martin Fradley

MARTIN FRADLEY teaches at the University of Manchester, U.K.

BOOK DATA Daniel Bernardi (ed.), *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*. New York: Routledge, 2008. $125.00 cloth; $27.95 paper. 416 pages.

Cindy Patton, *Cinematic Identity: Anatomy of a Problem Film*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. $58.50 cloth; $20.00 paper. 232 pages.

MICHAEL ARONSON

## *Hollywood in the Neighborhood: Historical Case Studies of Local Moviegoing* ed. Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley

If, in 1995, you had asked a group of film historians to lay stakes on which would be published first, a book on early exhibition practices in Manhattan or one on moviegoing in America's small towns, without a doubt the resulting wager would have been heavily lopsided in favor of the metropolis. I know all my money would have been on the city that never sleeps. But with the release of *Hollywood in the Neighborhood*, a smartly conceived and sorely needed anthology devoted to the first fifty years of moviegoing in the "less-metropolitan" environs of rural America, I am happy to say I would have lost that bet. Let's consider this review payment in full.

1995 is not just an arbitrarily chosen moment in the short history of film history, for it marks the year in which a "lively debate" (as this book's introduction diplomatically describes it) began in the pages of *Cinema Journal* between Ben Singer and Robert C. Allen. Their sharp exchange of textual blows specifically targeted the accuracy of each other's analysis of New York's nickelodeon theaters, their owners and assumed audiences. The intensity of the dispute highlighted the growing importance of exhibition and moviegoing history within film studies, but its most constructive impact was the widespread recognition that a "Gothamcentric" approach offered only a modest piece of the much larger and complex geography of American movie culture. Clearly, more work could be done on other periods and other places, particularly those located in the country's less populated, less cosmopolitan communities. However, acknowledging the need to attend to a more varied landscape was the easy part. For the Big Apple battle also prompted a set of tough reflexive questions about how best to construct an "accurate" history of exhibition and audiences; about the nature of evidence when the subject is a social structure not a filmic one; and about whether a film historian can make (wide-ranging) interpretive claims based on (purposefully narrow) empirical findings.

It is this last puzzle that scholars of the local often find the most problematic to solve: how to take the results of sometimes years of painstaking research, whether dealing with exhibition in a small town or big city, and craft out of it a hypothesis with a use value that productively extends beyond that individual settlement's residential boundaries. There is an inherent paradox built into this type of highly localized work; the best, like that found in this collection, is intently focused and meticulously specific. But this very purposeful confinement of subject, limiting one's conclusions about moviegoing to Placerville, Des Moines, or Wilmington often disallows for the speculative (and bookselling) power of generalization. No master narratives are written about Wilmington, no grand theories are derived from Des Moines, and, it seems safe to say, there will likely never be a well-cited "Placerville thesis."

But there is, of course, something that has come to regularly be referred to (most often by those attacking it) as the "modernity thesis," a loose but influential conglomerate of ideas that situates the social and stylistic power of early cinema within the fractured, whirling experience of urban modernity. Although you would be hard pressed to find a proponent of this phenomenal definition of "modernity" who would claim its exclusivity, it is certainly true that the collective emphasis by influential film scholars on the speed, shock, and disorientation of industrialized metropolitan life has resulted in too little work to understand the movies within a less urban milieu. It is this historiographic deficiency of a rural modernity that Robert C. Allen (again) and Ronald G. Walters take up explicitly in the two essays that bookend this anthology. Together they argue that, purposefully or not, the predominant focus on the movies as part of big-city life has

furore and local authorities in Marshall, Texas attempted to censor it, on the grounds that the film would "incite racial conflict" (48), but the Supreme Court declared this unconstitutional. Yet this indication of a turning tide was not an unambiguous triumph and *Cinematic Identity* concludes on a somber note. Intimating that the emergence of identity politics may well have been as unhealthily divisive as it was politically necessary, Patton notes that Hollywood empathetic liberalism "allowed white viewers to avoid conceding *their* racism" by "recognizing Black people as repositories of rights without recognizing themselves as conduits of structural racism" (109). One only has to look to the self-congratulation evident in Paul Haggis's *Crash* (2004), a notable heir to the post-war problem films, to start to agree with the author's assertion that no matter how demonstratively it confesses, America still refuses to testify to the full reality of its racial history. © 2010 Martin Fradley

MARTIN FRADLEY teaches at the University of Manchester, U.K.

BOOK DATA Daniel Bernardi (ed.), *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*. New York: Routledge, 2008. $125.00 cloth; $27.95 paper. 416 pages.

Cindy Patton, *Cinematic Identity: Anatomy of a Problem Film*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. $58.50 cloth; $20.00 paper. 232 pages.

MICHAEL ARONSON

## *Hollywood in the Neighborhood: Historical Case Studies of Local Moviegoing* ed. Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley

If, in 1995, you had asked a group of film historians to lay stakes on which would be published first, a book on early exhibition practices in Manhattan or one on moviegoing in America's small towns, without a doubt the resulting wager would have been heavily lopsided in favor of the metropolis. I know all my money would have been on the city that never sleeps. But with the release of *Hollywood in the Neighborhood*, a smartly conceived and sorely needed anthology devoted to the first fifty years of moviegoing in the "less-metropolitan" environs of rural America, I am happy to say I would have lost that bet. Let's consider this review payment in full.

1995 is not just an arbitrarily chosen moment in the short history of film history, for it marks the year in which a "lively debate" (as this book's introduction diplomatically describes it) began in the pages of *Cinema Journal* between Ben Singer and Robert C. Allen. Their sharp exchange of textual blows specifically targeted the accuracy of each other's analysis of New York's nickelodeon theaters, their owners and assumed audiences. The intensity of the dispute highlighted the growing importance of exhibition and moviegoing history within film studies, but its most constructive impact was the widespread recognition that a "Gothamcentric" approach offered only a modest piece of the much larger and complex geography of American movie culture. Clearly, more work could be done on other periods and other places, particularly those located in the country's less populated, less cosmopolitan communities. However, acknowledging the need to attend to a more varied landscape was the easy part. For the Big Apple battle also prompted a set of tough reflexive questions about how best to construct an "accurate" history of exhibition and audiences; about the nature of evidence when the subject is a social structure not a filmic one; and about whether a film historian can make (wide-ranging) interpretive claims based on (purposefully narrow) empirical findings.

It is this last puzzle that scholars of the local often find the most problematic to solve: how to take the results of sometimes years of painstaking research, whether dealing with exhibition in a small town or big city, and craft out of it a hypothesis with a use value that productively extends beyond that individual settlement's residential boundaries. There is an inherent paradox built into this type of highly localized work; the best, like that found in this collection, is intently focused and meticulously specific. But this very purposeful confinement of subject, limiting one's conclusions about moviegoing to Placerville, Des Moines, or Wilmington often disallows for the speculative (and bookselling) power of generalization. No master narratives are written about Wilmington, no grand theories are derived from Des Moines, and, it seems safe to say, there will likely never be a well-cited "Placerville thesis."

But there is, of course, something that has come to regularly be referred to (most often by those attacking it) as the "modernity thesis," a loose but influential conglomerate of ideas that situates the social and stylistic power of early cinema within the fractured, whirling experience of urban modernity. Although you would be hard pressed to find a proponent of this phenomenal definition of "modernity" who would claim its exclusivity, it is certainly true that the collective emphasis by influential film scholars on the speed, shock, and disorientation of industrialized metropolitan life has resulted in too little work to understand the movies within a less urban milieu. It is this historiographic deficiency of a rural modernity that Robert C. Allen (again) and Ronald G. Walters take up explicitly in the two essays that bookend this anthology. Together they argue that, purposefully or not, the predominant focus on the movies as part of big-city life has

distorted the understanding of early cinema's exhibition and reception. Allen takes Ben Singer to task again, but his more important contribution is to remind us how the very classifications of "urban" and "rural" are historically determined, noting that in 1910 the U.S. census defined a "city" as a incorporated center of only 2500 people. For Allen and Walters, the majority rules, and they compellingly highlight how little we still know about our social middle, the big towns, small cities, and wide swaths of unincorporated villages, in which most Americans have lived their lives and gone to the movies.

If these two are convincing in their arguments, it is because the proof of their claims is sustained by the cumulative labor of the book's other important contributors, including Greg Waller, Anne Morey, and Richard Abel. These three along with several others provide detailed studies that foreground the often delicately balanced, multivalent functions that small-town theaters and their owners were required to play in the everyday existence of their communities. Exhibitors were most often local businessmen (and occasionally women too) but the product they sold necessitated constant complex negotiation to achieve a profitable equilibrium between native and national concerns, indigenous and mass-produced culture, urban films and rural customers. However, even when the small-town exhibitor expertly enacted his role as social middleman, larger forces beyond his control, whether a snowstorm, the depression, or the increasingly consolidated power of the Hollywood studios, frequently buffeted him. The result often was, for theaters at the geographic and economic periphery, as Kathy Fuller Seeley aptly illustrates, that a "hit" film like *Gone With The Wind* (1939) could cause more problems than it solved. A film that makes sense in the big city, fails in the small town. The reasons are complicated, but that, of course, is why this anthology is so essential.

Offering a wealth of original research and analysis *Hollywood in the Neighborhood* greatly enriches our still limited geography of American moviegoing, contributing substantially to film's existing history. If the book leaves me at all unsatisfied, it is only because it succeeds in making visible how vast that history needs to be, and how far we still have to go in mapping the movies. And, of course, I'm still waiting for a book on New York City. Want to bet? © 2010 Michael Aronson

MICHAEL ARONSON is an assistant professor of Film and Media Studies at the University of Oregon. He is the author of *Nickelodeon City* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), a history of early moviegoing in Pittsburgh.

BOOK DATA Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley, *Hollywood in the Neighborhood: Historical Case Studies of Local Moviegoing.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. $65.00 cloth; $27.95 paper. 290 pages.

FRANCIS G. COUVARES

## *Nickelodeon City: Pittsburgh at the Movies, 1905–1929* by Michael Aronson

*Nickelodeon City* makes a fine contribution to the growing local history of movies in America. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, when movies are supposed to have settled decisively into their institutional and discursive forms, Aronson argues, the great transition happened less quickly and totally than dominant narratives insist. Nickelodeons hung on in Pittsburgh and places like it, while distributors and exhibitors relied on mixed programs and on "stunts" and other tactics for "pushing" these programs. These tactics allowed them to compete successfully well past the moment when feature films and centralized means of distribution are supposed to have taken over. In the end, however, though Aronson labors mightily to make that argument, his book tells the story of a delay in, more than an alternative to, that transition.

Nevertheless, *Nickelodeon City* offers many rewards to students of movie history. It is quite readable—briskly written and amply illustrated. Its first few chapters nicely set the scene, showing why industrialized Pittsburgh, a transportation nexus and the home of thousands of immigrants with a few nickels in their pockets, became an important regional hub in the evolving movie business. The author limns the characters and narrates the careers of the doughty Harry Davis, and his sometime partner John Harris, along with a small army of fellow entrepreneurs (including the Warner brothers), who built theaters, large and small, and exchanges, local and regional. Concerning the latter, Aronson makes a strong case that they played no less an authorial role than did exhibitors in shaping movie programs, and, therefore, the experience of moviegoing. Together, these entrepreneurs, although they sometimes grandiosely spoke of the cultural mission of the movies, more often gave the growing working-class (and increasingly middle-class) audiences what they wanted: cheap and varied entertainment. These merchants of leisure were "showmen," whose methods and sensibilities reached back to the dime museums and perhaps (although Aronson does not make this link) forward to YouTube and the freewheeling world of the Internet. Even after the rise of studios and chains, some of them kept tightly focused on those locals and continued to make moviegoing the sort of active experience of community formation and reinforcement that it had once been more regularly.

*Nickelodeon City* is, like its subject, something of a smorgasbord. The chapters are a series of interrelated but distinct explorations into moviemaking, showing, and viewing, based rigorously on local records—especially fruitfully on the under-

distorted the understanding of early cinema's exhibition and reception. Allen takes Ben Singer to task again, but his more important contribution is to remind us how the very classifications of "urban" and "rural" are historically determined, noting that in 1910 the U.S. census defined a "city" as a incorporated center of only 2500 people. For Allen and Walters, the majority rules, and they compellingly highlight how little we still know about our social middle, the big towns, small cities, and wide swaths of unincorporated villages, in which most Americans have lived their lives and gone to the movies.

If these two are convincing in their arguments, it is because the proof of their claims is sustained by the cumulative labor of the book's other important contributors, including Greg Waller, Anne Morey, and Richard Abel. These three along with several others provide detailed studies that foreground the often delicately balanced, multivalent functions that small-town theaters and their owners were required to play in the everyday existence of their communities. Exhibitors were most often local businessmen (and occasionally women too) but the product they sold necessitated constant complex negotiation to achieve a profitable equilibrium between native and national concerns, indigenous and mass-produced culture, urban films and rural customers. However, even when the small-town exhibitor expertly enacted his role as social middleman, larger forces beyond his control, whether a snowstorm, the depression, or the increasingly consolidated power of the Hollywood studios, frequently buffeted him. The result often was, for theaters at the geographic and economic periphery, as Kathy Fuller Seeley aptly illustrates, that a "hit" film like *Gone With The Wind* (1939) could cause more problems than it solved. A film that makes sense in the big city, fails in the small town. The reasons are complicated, but that, of course, is why this anthology is so essential.

Offering a wealth of original research and analysis *Hollywood in the Neighborhood* greatly enriches our still limited geography of American moviegoing, contributing substantially to film's existing history. If the book leaves me at all unsatisfied, it is only because it succeeds in making visible how vast that history needs to be, and how far we still have to go in mapping the movies. And, of course, I'm still waiting for a book on New York City. Want to bet? © 2010 Michael Aronson

MICHAEL ARONSON is an assistant professor of Film and Media Studies at the University of Oregon. He is the author of *Nickelodeon City* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), a history of early moviegoing in Pittsburgh.

BOOK DATA Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley, *Hollywood in the Neighborhood: Historical Case Studies of Local Moviegoing.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. $65.00 cloth; $27.95 paper. 290 pages.

FRANCIS G. COUVARES

## *Nickelodeon City: Pittsburgh at the Movies, 1905–1929* by Michael Aronson

*Nickelodeon City* makes a fine contribution to the growing local history of movies in America. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, when movies are supposed to have settled decisively into their institutional and discursive forms, Aronson argues, the great transition happened less quickly and totally than dominant narratives insist. Nickelodeons hung on in Pittsburgh and places like it, while distributors and exhibitors relied on mixed programs and on "stunts" and other tactics for "pushing" these programs. These tactics allowed them to compete successfully well past the moment when feature films and centralized means of distribution are supposed to have taken over. In the end, however, though Aronson labors mightily to make that argument, his book tells the story of a delay in, more than an alternative to, that transition.

Nevertheless, *Nickelodeon City* offers many rewards to students of movie history. It is quite readable—briskly written and amply illustrated. Its first few chapters nicely set the scene, showing why industrialized Pittsburgh, a transportation nexus and the home of thousands of immigrants with a few nickels in their pockets, became an important regional hub in the evolving movie business. The author limns the characters and narrates the careers of the doughty Harry Davis, and his sometime partner John Harris, along with a small army of fellow entrepreneurs (including the Warner brothers), who built theaters, large and small, and exchanges, local and regional. Concerning the latter, Aronson makes a strong case that they played no less an authorial role than did exhibitors in shaping movie programs, and, therefore, the experience of moviegoing. Together, these entrepreneurs, although they sometimes grandiosely spoke of the cultural mission of the movies, more often gave the growing working-class (and increasingly middle-class) audiences what they wanted: cheap and varied entertainment. These merchants of leisure were "showmen," whose methods and sensibilities reached back to the dime museums and perhaps (although Aronson does not make this link) forward to YouTube and the freewheeling world of the Internet. Even after the rise of studios and chains, some of them kept tightly focused on those locals and continued to make moviegoing the sort of active experience of community formation and reinforcement that it had once been more regularly.

*Nickelodeon City* is, like its subject, something of a smorgasbord. The chapters are a series of interrelated but distinct explorations into moviemaking, showing, and viewing, based rigorously on local records—especially fruitfully on the under-

explored pages of the *Pittsburgh Moving Picture Bulletin*, which survived for a decade and a half after its founding in 1914. The author's big argument about the great transition reemerges here and there to provide some sort of glue, but one does better not to worry too much about that. The reader rather should enjoy and learn from Aronson's demonstration, in chapter 3, that the economics of exhibition kept nickel admission prices the norm in Pittsburgh right up to World War II. The reader can also, in chapter 5, garner new insights into the dynamics of censorship at the local and state levels, in the years well before the emergence of the Production Code and the Legion of Decency; among other things, Aronson reminds us that, while exhibitors often fought censorship, they quite frequently promoted it in order to forestall police harassment and audience displeasure.

Better still, in chapter 6, the reader can profit from the author's essay on the strange career of Charlie Silveus. A small-time maker and shower of films in Waynesburg, an industrial town south of Pittsburgh, Silveus showed firefighters and paraders and picnickers and all sorts of locals doing all sorts of ordinary things that were special to them. Silveus's story, better than any other told in this book, embodies one of Aronson's strongest claims, that, at least until the rise of sound made small-time production unfeasible, the intensely local and stylistically unsophisticated films made by Silveus (and, presumably, others) constituted not an "alternative" but a "complementary" cinema (211–12). *Nickelodeon City* concludes with this note: "that these films were regularly programmed alongside the studios' raises serious questions about how we should imagine the moviegoing experience in this era" (247).

After Lee Grieveson's strenuously argued *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (University of California Press, 2004), which seems to nail the imposition of hegemony down to the mid-1910s, it is useful to remind ourselves that the meaning of the movies —or any form of culture, popular or otherwise—is never really foreclosed or imposed perfectly or permanently. Of course, it would be a mistake to exaggerate the democratic tendencies of pre-Hollywood cinema, or the communal achievements of the Charlie Sliveuses of this world. But Aronson's book avoids the latter pitfalls, while enriching scholars' understanding of the local dynamics of film distribution and the thick web of local contexts within which movies engaged audiences. © 2010 Francis G. Couvares

FRANCIS G. COUVARES is E. Dwight Salmon Professor of History and American Studies at Amherst College. He is the author of *The Remaking of Pittsburgh: Class and Culture in an Industrializing City, 1877–1919* (SUNY Press, 1984).

BOOK DATA Michael Aronson, *Nickelodeon City: Pittsburgh at the Movies, 1905–1929.* Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008. $35.95 cloth. 316 pages.

DAVID LADERMAN

## *How the West Was Sung: Music in the Westerns of John Ford* by Kathryn Kalinak

When thinking of John Ford's Westerns, music may not come immediately to mind. Film buffs may first flash on those gorgeous, slightly low-angle horizon shots, often capturing the majestic pillars of Monument Valley; or those unmistakable, greatly influential views from inside doorways or windows, looking out into a barren wilderness; or those countless dramatic moments where the forces of nature and culture meet, many featuring John Wayne or Henry Fonda or James Stewart as stoic but noble frontiersmen, awkward around women but ready for action if called upon. *How the West Was Sung: Music in the Westerns of John Ford* beneficially expands our appreciation of Ford's Westerns to include the music, situated in relation to these signature Fordian visuals and themes. Kalinak also goes further, exploring how music contributes to the complex portrayal of ethnicity, sexuality, and national identity in Ford's films.

The book's introduction provides a concise overview of previous Ford scholarship that discusses music, then outlines Kalinak's project of "systematic analysis" involving an inventory of "which songs appear in which films" and an explication of the various textual operations, "cultural contexts," and "production histories" of the films' scores and songs (3). This is familiar territory for the author, who has written extensively on film and music, and whose first book, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1992) has become a critical touchstone. While that book had a more ambitious scope, *How the West Was Sung* is nonetheless an instructive case study that has implications for the study of classical Hollywood overall. Additionally, *How the West Was Sung* contributes to the growing body of recent film scholarship analyzing sound and music in relation to genre, such as Kevin Donnelly's *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* (BFI Publishing, 2005), William Whittington's *Sound Design and Science Fiction* (University of Texas Press, 2007), the anthology *Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film Sound* (University of Illinois Press, 2008—to which I contributed an essay), and Philip Hayward's *Terror Tracks: Music, Sound and Horror Cinema* (Equinox, 2009).

*How the West Was Sung* is organized chronologically around key texts, starting off with two silent Westerns from 1926, and concluding with Ford's last, *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964). While Kalinak discusses several of the major films— *Stagecoach* (1939), *My Darling Clementine* (1946), *The*

explored pages of the *Pittsburgh Moving Picture Bulletin*, which survived for a decade and a half after its founding in 1914. The author's big argument about the great transition reemerges here and there to provide some sort of glue, but one does better not to worry too much about that. The reader rather should enjoy and learn from Aronson's demonstration, in chapter 3, that the economics of exhibition kept nickel admission prices the norm in Pittsburgh right up to World War II. The reader can also, in chapter 5, garner new insights into the dynamics of censorship at the local and state levels, in the years well before the emergence of the Production Code and the Legion of Decency; among other things, Aronson reminds us that, while exhibitors often fought censorship, they quite frequently promoted it in order to forestall police harassment and audience displeasure.

Better still, in chapter 6, the reader can profit from the author's essay on the strange career of Charlie Silveus. A small-time maker and shower of films in Waynesburg, an industrial town south of Pittsburgh, Silveus showed firefighters and paraders and picnickers and all sorts of locals doing all sorts of ordinary things that were special to them. Silveus's story, better than any other told in this book, embodies one of Aronson's strongest claims, that, at least until the rise of sound made small-time production unfeasible, the intensely local and stylistically unsophisticated films made by Silveus (and, presumably, others) constituted not an "alternative" but a "complementary" cinema (211–12). *Nickelodeon City* concludes with this note: "that these films were regularly programmed alongside the studios' raises serious questions about how we should imagine the moviegoing experience in this era" (247).

After Lee Grieveson's strenuously argued *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (University of California Press, 2004), which seems to nail the imposition of hegemony down to the mid-1910s, it is useful to remind ourselves that the meaning of the movies —or any form of culture, popular or otherwise—is never really foreclosed or imposed perfectly or permanently. Of course, it would be a mistake to exaggerate the democratic tendencies of pre-Hollywood cinema, or the communal achievements of the Charlie Sliveuses of this world. But Aronson's book avoids the latter pitfalls, while enriching scholars' understanding of the local dynamics of film distribution and the thick web of local contexts within which movies engaged audiences. © 2010 Francis G. Couvares

FRANCIS G. COUVARES is E. Dwight Salmon Professor of History and American Studies at Amherst College. He is the author of *The Remaking of Pittsburgh: Class and Culture in an Industrializing City, 1877–1919* (SUNY Press, 1984).

BOOK DATA Michael Aronson, *Nickelodeon City: Pittsburgh at the Movies, 1905–1929.* Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008. $35.95 cloth. 316 pages.

DAVID LADERMAN

## *How the West Was Sung: Music in the Westerns of John Ford* by Kathryn Kalinak

When thinking of John Ford's Westerns, music may not come immediately to mind. Film buffs may first flash on those gorgeous, slightly low-angle horizon shots, often capturing the majestic pillars of Monument Valley; or those unmistakable, greatly influential views from inside doorways or windows, looking out into a barren wilderness; or those countless dramatic moments where the forces of nature and culture meet, many featuring John Wayne or Henry Fonda or James Stewart as stoic but noble frontiersmen, awkward around women but ready for action if called upon. *How the West Was Sung: Music in the Westerns of John Ford* beneficially expands our appreciation of Ford's Westerns to include the music, situated in relation to these signature Fordian visuals and themes. Kalinak also goes further, exploring how music contributes to the complex portrayal of ethnicity, sexuality, and national identity in Ford's films.

The book's introduction provides a concise overview of previous Ford scholarship that discusses music, then outlines Kalinak's project of "systematic analysis" involving an inventory of "which songs appear in which films" and an explication of the various textual operations, "cultural contexts," and "production histories" of the films' scores and songs (3). This is familiar territory for the author, who has written extensively on film and music, and whose first book, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1992) has become a critical touchstone. While that book had a more ambitious scope, *How the West Was Sung* is nonetheless an instructive case study that has implications for the study of classical Hollywood overall. Additionally, *How the West Was Sung* contributes to the growing body of recent film scholarship analyzing sound and music in relation to genre, such as Kevin Donnelly's *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* (BFI Publishing, 2005), William Whittington's *Sound Design and Science Fiction* (University of Texas Press, 2007), the anthology *Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film Sound* (University of Illinois Press, 2008—to which I contributed an essay), and Philip Hayward's *Terror Tracks: Music, Sound and Horror Cinema* (Equinox, 2009).

*How the West Was Sung* is organized chronologically around key texts, starting off with two silent Westerns from 1926, and concluding with Ford's last, *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964). While Kalinak discusses several of the major films— *Stagecoach* (1939), *My Darling Clementine* (1946), *The*

*Searcers* (1956), *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962)—she also addresses the music of less familiar works, such as *3 Godfathers* (1950) and *Two Rode Together* (1961). To its credit, the book efficiently integrates a number of different critical approaches—"cultural studies, feminist theory, masculinity studies, ethnic studies and discourses of authorship" (4)—with interviews, personal papers, various studio records, files, and archives. At the center of this multiplicity of perspectives, Kalinak carefully wedges a balanced (meaning: not naïve) auteurism, which seems appropriate to Ford's grand stature. Indeed, the first chapter, subtitled "Music in the Life and Films of John Ford," demonstrates that Ford was deeply involved in the creation, selection, and utilization of his films' music. However, Kalinak attends to the institutional and other factors that were also in play. This wide-ranging approach is refreshing and commendable.

Studying the music in Ford's Westerns means studying Ford at work and *How the West Was Sung* is unusually well illustrated with publicity stills of music performance and rehearsals during production, sheet music covers, musical sketches, and studio memos. The illustrations supplement Kalinak's extensive primary research, incorporating Ford's personal papers, interviews with surviving friends and family members, and detailed production information. She provides back-story on the music itself: who composed it, how it was composed, when and where it first appeared, and so on. Each interesting, well-written chapter additionally includes incisive textual interpretation of the form and function of the music, tracing its use in relation to characterization, historical associations, narrative motifs and themes.

The combination of industrial analysis and textual interpretation is distinctive and rewarding. An example of valuable interpretation comes when Kalinak discusses famous dance numbers in *My Darling Clementine*, the Calvary trilogy, or *Two Rode Together*, teasing out important connotations of the musical selection and instrumentation accompanying these, including how this music contributes to Ford's commentary on class differences or on the role of religion on the frontier. An example of important production research occurs in the discussion of the conflict between Ford and producer Darryl F. Zanuck over the final cut of *My Darling Clementine*, where the latter removed "some of the most recognizable folk tunes" from Ford's original, largely diegetic score, adding nondiegetic orchestral cues that "alter the musical design of the film," away from its "stark, almost modernist quality" (87). Kalinak's appreciation of the music in Ford's most-debated film, *The Searchers*, is another highlight. Noting that *Searchers* scholarship does not dwell much on the music, Kalinak elucidates how the *interruption* of music is key to the film's major themes, especially race and sexuality; how composer Max Steiner and Ford did not see eye-to-eye on the score, suggestive of a European versus American approach; and how only certain verses of the original title song, those that help elevate the film "from a generic western to a metaphysical quest" (158), found their way into the film—probably, according to Kalinak, due to Ford's own intuitions and intervention.

As unpacked by Kalinak, the book's thesis, that "John Ford's choices of folk song, hymnody and period music significantly affect the meaning of his westerns" (194), reveals in vivid detail something aficionados of Ford's Westerns may have previously sensed, but now can more fully understand (and hear). *How the West Was Sung* makes an uncommon but satisfying addition to the literature on John Ford's Westerns. © 2010 David Laderman

DAVID LADERMAN is Professor of Film at the College of San Mateo.

BOOK DATA Kathryn Kalinak, *How the West Was Sung: Music in the Westerns of John Ford*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. $65.00 cloth; $27.95 paper. 256 pages.

NOAH ISENBERG

## *Edgar G. Ulmer: Detour on Poverty Row*
## ed. Gary D. Rhodes

Although for significant stretches of time it appeared as though Edgar G. Ulmer's career as a director would ultimately, almost inexorably, find its way into the proverbial dustbin of history, the past several years have been quite kind to the Austrian-born filmmaker. Not only have there been a number of full-scale retrospectives of his work in such cities as Edinburgh, New York, and Vienna, but there have also been multi-day scholarly conferences held on two continents, a string of DVD releases—from his B-pictures made for Producers Releasing Corporation in the 1940s to his no-budget horror and sci-fi flicks of the 1950s and early 60s, even the four Depression-era Yiddish features he directed—together with a steady stream of writing, from articles to book-length studies, aimed at reevaluating the director. In 2003, Viennese film and cultural critic Stefan Grissemann published his outstanding German-language biography, *Man in the Shadows: The Filmmaker Edgar G. Ulmer* (*Mann im Schatten: Der Filmemacher Edgar G. Ulmer*, Paul Zsolnay Verlag)—which was soon followed by Michael Palm's documentary film

*Searcers* (1956), *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962)—she also addresses the music of less familiar works, such as *3 Godfathers* (1950) and *Two Rode Together* (1961). To its credit, the book efficiently integrates a number of different critical approaches—"cultural studies, feminist theory, masculinity studies, ethnic studies and discourses of authorship" (4)—with interviews, personal papers, various studio records, files, and archives. At the center of this multiplicity of perspectives, Kalinak carefully wedges a balanced (meaning: not naïve) auteurism, which seems appropriate to Ford's grand stature. Indeed, the first chapter, subtitled "Music in the Life and Films of John Ford," demonstrates that Ford was deeply involved in the creation, selection, and utilization of his films' music. However, Kalinak attends to the institutional and other factors that were also in play. This wide-ranging approach is refreshing and commendable.

Studying the music in Ford's Westerns means studying Ford at work and *How the West Was Sung* is unusually well illustrated with publicity stills of music performance and rehearsals during production, sheet music covers, musical sketches, and studio memos. The illustrations supplement Kalinak's extensive primary research, incorporating Ford's personal papers, interviews with surviving friends and family members, and detailed production information. She provides back-story on the music itself: who composed it, how it was composed, when and where it first appeared, and so on. Each interesting, well-written chapter additionally includes incisive textual interpretation of the form and function of the music, tracing its use in relation to characterization, historical associations, narrative motifs and themes.

The combination of industrial analysis and textual interpretation is distinctive and rewarding. An example of valuable interpretation comes when Kalinak discusses famous dance numbers in *My Darling Clementine*, the Calvary trilogy, or *Two Rode Together*, teasing out important connotations of the musical selection and instrumentation accompanying these, including how this music contributes to Ford's commentary on class differences or on the role of religion on the frontier. An example of important production research occurs in the discussion of the conflict between Ford and producer Darryl F. Zanuck over the final cut of *My Darling Clementine*, where the latter removed "some of the most recognizable folk tunes" from Ford's original, largely diegetic score, adding nondiegetic orchestral cues that "alter the musical design of the film," away from its "stark, almost modernist quality" (87). Kalinak's appreciation of the music in Ford's most-debated film, *The Searchers*, is another highlight. Noting that *Searchers* scholarship does not dwell much on the music, Kalinak elucidates how the *interruption* of music is key to the film's major themes, especially race and sexuality; how composer Max Steiner and Ford did not see eye-to-eye on the score, suggestive of a European versus American approach; and how only certain verses of the original title song, those that help elevate the film "from a generic western to a metaphysical quest" (158), found their way into the film—probably, according to Kalinak, due to Ford's own intuitions and intervention.

As unpacked by Kalinak, the book's thesis, that "John Ford's choices of folk song, hymnody and period music significantly affect the meaning of his westerns" (194), reveals in vivid detail something aficionados of Ford's Westerns may have previously sensed, but now can more fully understand (and hear). *How the West Was Sung* makes an uncommon but satisfying addition to the literature on John Ford's Westerns. © 2010 David Laderman

DAVID LADERMAN is Professor of Film at the College of San Mateo.

BOOK DATA Kathryn Kalinak, *How the West Was Sung: Music in the Westerns of John Ford*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. $65.00 cloth; $27.95 paper. 256 pages.

NOAH ISENBERG

## *Edgar G. Ulmer: Detour on Poverty Row*
## ed. Gary D. Rhodes

Although for significant stretches of time it appeared as though Edgar G. Ulmer's career as a director would ultimately, almost inexorably, find its way into the proverbial dustbin of history, the past several years have been quite kind to the Austrian-born filmmaker. Not only have there been a number of full-scale retrospectives of his work in such cities as Edinburgh, New York, and Vienna, but there have also been multi-day scholarly conferences held on two continents, a string of DVD releases—from his B-pictures made for Producers Releasing Corporation in the 1940s to his no-budget horror and sci-fi flicks of the 1950s and early 60s, even the four Depression-era Yiddish features he directed—together with a steady stream of writing, from articles to book-length studies, aimed at reevaluating the director. In 2003, Viennese film and cultural critic Stefan Grissemann published his outstanding German-language biography, *Man in the Shadows: The Filmmaker Edgar G. Ulmer* (*Mann im Schatten: Der Filmemacher Edgar G. Ulmer*, Paul Zsolnay Verlag)—which was soon followed by Michael Palm's documentary film

**WWW.FILMQUARTERLY.ORG**

Two web exclusive texts, a dialogue about Lars von Trier's *Antichrist* and a report from the 2009 London Film Festival, are now available at www.filmquarterly.org/webexclusives/


*Edgar G Ulmer: The Man Off-Screen* (2004)—and within the past year a small flurry of critical anthologies have been published (in addition to the work under review, two separate volumes, both edited by German scholar Bernd Herzogenrath, have appeared). There are by now clear signs that an Ulmer renaissance, small as it may be, is afoot.

In this auspicious climate, Gary D. Rhodes, a lecturer in film studies at Queens University in Belfast, Northern Ireland, has assembled nineteen essays dedicated to reconsidering the merits of the so-called "King of the Bs." Rhodes divides his book into four distinct, though in no small measure overlapping, parts: "Texts and Contexts," "Film Noir," "Individual Films," and "Case Study—*The Black Cat* (1934)." The volume covers the entire sweep of Ulmer's altogether unpredictable and occasionally downright checkered career, from his very early sexploitation film, *Damaged Lives* (1933), up to his final pictures, most of them forgotten by now, made in Europe in the early 1960s, including *Journey Beneath the Desert* (*L'Atlantide*, 1961). Indebted to the work of such early Ulmer scholars and champions as John Belton, Bill Krohn, and Peter Bogdanovich, among others, the essays are not always particularly long on new discovery. The key standouts, in my estimation, include Claudia Pummer's contribution on the hidden connections between Ulmer's Ukrainian operetta, *Cossacks in Exile* (1939), and his Yiddish musical, *The Singing Blacksmith* (1938); Steffen Hantke's illuminating treatment of the figure of the artist, and Ulmer's putative self-identification with him, in *Bluebeard* (1944); and Reynold Humphries' Freudian reading of masochism and masculinity—a nice update to the early work of Tania Modleski—in *Detour* (1945). Many of the more successful contributions are contained in the section devoted to individual films (generally those that do not belong to the mini canon of Ulmer's best-known work), where there tends to be more space devoted to sustained formal and critical analysis than to the standard rehash of Ulmer's career that mars more than a few contributions elsewhere in the volume.

As is not terribly uncommon with anthologies of this kind, the essays range widely, even wildly, in terms of quality and substance. There is indeed little, if any, uniformity of style, scope, or even the respective authors' command of the material in each of the contributions. The resulting litany of problems include, among other things, the continued perpetuation of various myths or faulty information (for example, that *Detour* was budgeted at $30,000 [18], when in fact its official budget was nearly three times that figure, and in the end the film cost over $117,000), inconsistent and periodically glaringly misprinted release dates, titles, and names, and an inordinate amount of repetition. Even simply in terms of length, a few of the more modest chapters barely hit the ten-page mark, while other, baggier contributions run over thirty printed pages. There is, moreover, no explicit intellectual rationale as to why there should be three individual chapters on *The Black Cat* and nearly half a dozen (either exclusive examinations or examinations that are part of a composite study) on *Detour*. Perhaps the most baffling deficiency of the anthology is that not a single production still, frame enlargment, lobby card, or other illustration has been included in the 300-page text—something that is even more inexplicable given the book's inflated price tag.

Despite such obvious and seemingly severe shortcomings, the volume does nonetheless manage to offer occasional insights concerning Ulmer's lesser-known films, a bit of new source material (Rhodes's own contribution on the reception of *The Black Cat*, for instance, gives a thorough account of how the film was handled in the trade and popular press) for students and scholars who might not have access to, or care to spend the extra time in, the archives, and a memorable turn of phrase here and there—according to one contributor, offering up a comparison in a culinary vein, "[s]o-called major directors brought the broiled salmon; Edgar Ulmer provided the fishsticks" (251). Irrespective of its deficiencies, the book indicates that a new generation of scholars and students from across the globe are rediscovering the work of Ulmer. Together with the efforts to preserve his films—more DVD releases are in the offing—scholarly attention of this kind will help to ensure that Ulmer eludes that nasty, unforgiving dustbin once and for all. © 2010 Noah Isenberg


NOAH ISENBERG is the author of *Detour* (BFI Film Classics, 2008) and the editor of *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era* (Columbia University Press, 2009).



BOOK DATA Gary D. Rhodes (ed.), *Edgar G. Ulmer: Detour on Poverty Row.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008. $85.00 cloth. 350 pages.

ELIZABETH A. LATHROP

## *Performing Illusions: Cinema, Special Effects and the Virtual Actor* by Dan North

Dan North's introduction to his study of special effects throughout the history of cinema is dynamic and bold. For example, he convincingly disputes the prediction that computer-generated actors—or "synthespians"—will one day be indistinguishable from flesh-and-blood humans on the screen. Even if this often-trumpeted Holy Grail of digital special effects were possible, North contends, it would not fully engage viewers. Although special effects are increasingly designed to be photorealistic and immersive, North argues that losing oneself in the spectacle of special effects is only one half of the fun. According to a model North calls the "spectacular dialectic," the second level of engagement with special effects occurs when viewers are challenged to locate their joints, the places at which special effects meet the real. From this point of view, the detectibility of special effects is not a design flaw but instead a key factor in the spectator's pleasure. North asserts: "The ultimate purpose of special effects is not one of deception (that is, the subterfuge of passing off an illusion as real) but of mediated ostentation" (13).

Because most special effects operate on the fact that they can be distinguished from that which is not a special effect, North brackets hidden CGI from inclusion in his study. Hidden CGI, or "invisible effects" such as the digital color-correction used in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), are not designed to be moments of ostentatious spectacle and thus do not fit the "spectacular dialectic" model of spectatorship. As N. M. Klein puts it, "What good is sleight of hand if you cannot see the hand?" (1). Furthermore, North argues that special effects not only convey narrative events, but also prompt reflection on the cinematic past and speculation about its future. Viewers make comparisons between a film's effects and similar ones from other films, conscious also that the future will bring still more ingenious effects.

*Performing Illusions* is composed of various case studies drawn from the whole of cinema history: Victorian magic shows, stop-motion animation, sci-fi films (notably the contrasting cases of low-budget alien-invasion films and space-travel epics), early films to use digital effects such as *Tron* (1982) and *The Last Starfighter* (1984), and films that employ the synthespian such as the *Spider-Man* (2002–07) and *Lord of the Rings* (2001–03) trilogies. Some chapters develop North's introductory claims more convincingly than others, but all discuss the ways in which special effects have a role in popularizing major technological developments. For example, the ways in which *Destination Moon* (1950) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) shaped public understanding of, and debate about, the space race and space exploration allows North to make the claim that "cinematic visual illusions have supplied visions of popular science's 'forthcoming attractions'" (183). North, however, does not reflect more broadly on this function of special effects until his conclusion, and *Performing Illusions* might have benefited from clearer explanation of its organization. This applies also to the book's subtitle: the inclusion of "virtual actor" seems strange, given North's reservation about treating the history of special effects in teleological terms (implying some end state of perfection of the synthespian toward which the technology is moving). In fact, in keeping with North's skepticism about the entirely revolutionary status of digital effects, perhaps his most distinctive contribution to the study of special effects is the first chapter, which links them to the illusionism and performative codes of nineteenth-century magic shows. Why then emphasize the virtual actor in the subtitle?

*Performing Illusions* is an important addition to debates about film realism. It critiques the classic defense of realism in André Bazin's work and builds an argument related to Stephen Prince's concept of "perceptual realism." North explains: "The sheer number of impossible creatures and landscapes conjured through CGI is evidence that its illusory capacities are not being employed in the service of anti-indexical representations so much as they are used to depict things which have no real-world referent" (22). Thus, North offers a corrective to those concerned with the passing of indexical cinema by reminding readers that the cinematic image always has been subject to alteration through special effects; digital technologies simply foreground this issue. As North writes: "Any innovation that downgrades the credibility of the image can be seen as contributing to a healthy culture of inquiry as to its veracity" (19).

North calls the study of special effects a "mistreated and misunderstood field in film studies" (6). *Performing Illusions* is a significant intervention in this expanding field and, minor objections aside, will prompt valuable debate. It can be highly recommended to scholars. © 2010 Elizabeth A. Lathrop

ELIZABETH A. LATHROP teaches Film Studies at Georgia Perimeter College.

BOOK DATA Dan North, *Performing Illusions: Cinema, Special Effects and the Virtual Actor.* London: Wallflower Press, 2008. $85.00 cloth; $28.00 paper. 232 pages.

ALEX KUPFER

## *Body Shots: Early Cinema's Incarnations* by Jonathan Auerbach

At the start of *Body Shots: Early Cinema's Incarnations*, Jonathan Auerbach concedes that 1890s films may often confound modern audiences. Early cinema lacks the characters, setting, and narratives that are now familiar. Instead, so Auerbach argues, films from cinema's first decade often bring the human body, whether in motion or at rest, to the forefront: "Early filmmaking makes manifest a rhetoric of human form, turning the body itself into an 'expressive medium'" since "practices of cinema during its first decade came to rely most crucially on the dynamic language of body movement" (2).

The subject of the human body has been largely overlooked in scholarly work on the early cinema as over the past two decades film studies have been "centrally engaged by questions of audience and spectatorship" (3), sometimes to the exclusion of specific image content. There has been a tendency, Auerbach contends, to overlook differences between individual films in favor of commonalities. In particular, the most prominent and influential of theories of early cinema—Tom Gunning's concept of "cinema of attractions," which emphasizes spectacle and display over narrative—has the effect, according to Auerbach, of "evacuating the early cinema image of form or content" (4). By focusing on early cinema's images of human bodies, *Body Shots* attempts to restore some of what has gone missing in the process.

Auerbach discusses films in relation to the degree of self-awareness of the filmed subject. The first part of his book, "Bodies in Public," makes a distinction between individuals who are simply being looked at by the audience and those who are "looking out" at us. Chapter 1 centers on how cinema altered an understanding of the relation between private and public space. Focusing on William McKinley, Auerbach analyzes the ways in which films—including the actuality produced during his 1896 presidential campaign from his Canton, Ohio home and the later reenactment of the electrocution of his assassin—to render McKinley "incarnate" (16). In the following chapter, Auerbach turns to self-conscious individuals caught between the events around them and the camera recording those events: peripheral figures such as the little boy in Edison's *What Happened on Twenty-Third Street, New York City* (1901), who intently stares into camera from the background while a woman's skirt is fluttered by air escaping from a subway grate in the foreground. Such inquisitive figures exemplify what tends to get left out by cinema-of-attractions accounts. The cinema's first decade provides a special opportunity for understanding images of self-consciousness because conventions for what "people did in front of the camera lens" (42) were only beginning to be codified as filmmakers searched for new ways to organize bodies on-screen.

Part 2, "Bodies in Space," takes a different approach, analyzing bodily representation in relation to films that were beginning to construct narrative, shifting from "showing to telling" (88). Early multi-shot chase films such as *The Escaped Lunatic* (1903) and *Personal* (1904) exemplify how the moving body, actively determined, and not simply occupied, space since spaces could be expanded and connected together based on the continuous movement of bodies between shots. Auerbach treats Porter's *The Life of an American Fireman* (1902) virtually as an experimental film (even comparing it to the work of Stan Brakhage) for the way in which it "deploys bodies to try out differing productions and reproductions of space" (105), utilizing a form of causality based on bodily movement rather than narrative logic. Having discussed corporeal movement throughout the book, Auerbach devotes a final chapter, "The Stilled Body," to what "happens when the body stops moving?" (124). The corollary of all this filmic movement is, he argues, the highlighting of stasis and death in early cinema, a "preoccupation with death" and the "vulnerability of the body to time" (133–34).

*Body Shots* ambitiously draws on a range of disciplines: not only film history and theory, but also American political history, performance studies, and psychology. Rather than proposing a totalizing theory or establishing a typology of all the permutations of corporeal representation in early cinema, Auerbach focuses on how the moving body inhabits and determines space. Given other work on this topic, it is worth noting that he admits at the outset that he is not concerned with identity or the cultural construction of the body. However, the book would have benefited from a fuller justification of what was omitted. Auerbach concedes, for example, that he does not discuss sports actualities and yet surely to have done so would have enabled him to reinforce his argument without resorting to identity politics. The subjects of early boxing films, for example, are perhaps rendered "incarnate" in the same manner as Wiliam McKinley since audiences came to see the boxers moving around the ring. Finally, however, *Body Shots* is an important intervention, persuasively making the case for the importance of the body to an understanding of the 1893–1904 period. © 2010 Alex Kupfer

ALEX KUPFER is a doctoral candidate in Cinema Studies at New York University.

BOOK DATA Jonathan Auerbach, *Body Shots: Early Cinema's Incarnations.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. $60.00 cloth; $27.95 paper. 214 pages.

MARTIN FRADLEY

***Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics***
**ed. Jeffrey Sconce**

***Uncanny Bodies: The Coming of Sound and the Origins of the Horror Genre***
**by Robert Spadoni**

Like Ken Feil's *Dying for a Laugh: Disaster Movies and the Camp Imagination* (Wesleyan University Press, 2005), Joan Hawkins's *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000), and the anthologies *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (Manchester University Press, 2003) and *The Cult Film Reader* (Open University Press, 2008), *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics* blends scholarship and fandom to explore alternative taste cultures and celebrate the political potential of "trashophilia."

Though these essays are rigorous and nuanced, they also exhibit the gleefully geeky tone of online fan forums, whose contributors tend to hold the mainstream in contempt and delight in rehabilitating marginal works. Sconce's influential concept of "paracinema"—those movies, in other words, that exist outside the canons of film criticism—informs the agenda of many of the essays gathered here. The contributions by Sconce himself, which bookend the volume, are good examples of the way conventional hierarchies of taste are questioned. *American Beauty* (1999) is scorned for its "midcult pomposity" (278), while *Josie and the Pussycats* (2001) and *Gigli* (2003) are defended. Regarding such scenes as Milla Jovovich toting an Uzi while wearing a bath towel amid post-apocalyptic debris, Sconce declares: "These are the great moments in our current cinema—symptoms of a cultural imagination unfettered in exploring the depths of its own confusion and bankruptcy . . . profoundly bizarre, disturbing, inane, and epiphinal moments that characterize our current cinematic plight" (305). *Sleaze Artists* also revels in bringing together sleaze and theory. Where else could you possibly find as unlikely a grouping of cultural bedfellows as *femme castrice* Lorena Bobbitt, Susan Sontag, Jason Voorhees, Pierre Bourdieu, Mario Bava, and sexploitation icon Chesty Morgan?

The strongest essays reconsider long-forgotten movies. Harry M. Benshoff offers a lively, impressively researched analysis of the surprising complexity and sophistication of some mid-century depictions of homosexuality in the military. In pre-Stonewall films such as *The Strange One* (1957) and *Billy Budd* (1962), Benshoff finds a progressive political dynamic that subverts official homophobic paranoia of the time. Equally engaging is Eric Schaeffer's work on 1960s "nudie cuties" and their relationship to the emergent sexual revolution. His essay on the marketing of softcore movies, allegedly produced in "Feel-a-Vision" and "Skinemascope" and with titles like *The Big Snatch* (1968), is an evocative slice of cultural history. Elsewhere, Kay Dickinson is perceptive on the aural semiotics of the synthesizer score for *Cannibal Holocaust* (1979); Joan Hawkins convincingly maps the presence of a camp sensibility throughout Todd Haynes' acclaimed *oeuvre*; while Tania Modleski provides a cautiously reflexive but incisive commentary on the gender politics traceable in the work of grindhouse auteur Doris Wishman. Working within the limitations of a genre that Modleski considers "more misogynist and brutally violent in its treatment of women than even . . . standard hardcore films" (49), Wishman's output reveals a tentative proto-feminist politics that finds its mirror image in Modleski's own ambivalent critical response to notorious examples of "sick cinema" such as *The Defilers* (1965).

Refreshingly, two of the collection's most valuable contributions serve to gently critique the academic exercise of rehabilitation. Matt Hills's essay on the long-running *Friday the 13th* franchise (1980–) usefully notes the ways in which scholarly accounts of trash fandom have regularly overemphasized its implicitly democratic challenge to mainstream film culture. Although delivered with caution, this is an important (and arguably long-overdue) line of critique; enjoying paracinema is not necessarily an oppositional pursuit. Greg Taylor discusses "geek chic," noting


**ADDRESS FOR REVIEW COPIES**

Matthew H. Bernstein
Emory University
Film Studies Department
109 Rich Building
1602 Fishburne Drive
Atlanta GA 30322

## IN THE NEXT ISSUE

James Naremore's
"Films of the Year"

## ABOUT THE JOURNAL

Please turn to page 84 for more information
about *Film Quarterly*


the way in which cult cinephilia is arguably no longer a *sub*cultural practice because "oppositional connoisseurship" (260) has itself found a place in the mainstream, as *Grindhouse* (2007) demonstrates. As, of course, do all the academic books on the subject, including this one, in which sleazy material inevitably loses much of its salaciousness. In the spirit of old-fashioned geeky self-deprecation, it is perhaps worth remembering that there are also few things less likely to arouse prurient interest than would-be academic hipsters lurking furtively at the margins.

At the heart of Robert Spadoni's well-researched and persuasive *Uncanny Bodies* is an iconic cult film. Despite the huge critical and commercial success it achieved upon release in 1931, Tod Browning's adaptation of *Dracula* has since gained a reputation as pure kitsch, a film hampered by stagy direction and the overacting of its star, Bela Lugosi. Spadoni argues instead that to truly appreciate *Dracula* it is necessary to go back to the context of its original release without revisionist critical baggage. His rewarding and original contribution is to look beyond the socioeconomic backdrop of the Great Depression in which cultural historians of the horror genre typically situate the movie. Instead, *Uncanny Bodies* combines aesthetics, reception study, and production history, repeatedly emphasizing that the appearance of both *Dracula* and James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) occurred during the industrially transitional period between *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and the close of the 1930–31 film release season; the period, that is, of the coming of sound.

Spadoni evocatively describes "the creaky, majestic slowness of *Dracula*" (1) and the "luminous gray worlds and yawning silences" and "tangible and delicious weirdness" of these movies. Yet the frighteningly modern world of synchronized sound paradoxically created a haunting aural chasm in the film. With only minimal ambient sound and without the musical score to which patrons of silent cinema would have been accustomed, the "voluminously empty soundscape" (78) of *Dracula* underscored the artificiality of cinema. According to Spadoni, it is precisely this primitive, ghostly unreality which gave the film its immediate power, reliant less on narrative than on uncanny audio-visual ambience created by the liquid strangeness and "bizarre textures and halting rhythms" (63) of Lugosi's voice; the expressive close-ups of tortured faces; the soporific pace and torpid editing; the long periods of silence and disturbing flatness of the mise-en-scène. Like the undead vampire himself, *Dracula* is caught between two (cinematic) worlds, fully belonging to neither. As Spadoni puts it: "The tumult of the sound transition produced not only talking ghosts but also silent ones—in silent sequences in part-talking films and in the all-silent films that continued to be screened throughout the transition period" (115); for film audiences also caught in this transitory moment, films like *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* "evoked the uncanny of early sound cinema at the same time that [they] evoked a silent cinema newly estranged by the same."

*Uncanny Bodies* posits that *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* represent the origin of the modern horror genre. Marketed initially not as a "horror" film but as a "mystery" or a "romance," *Dracula* nevertheless demonstrated that depictions of the monstrous and macabre could be seriously popular. In stressing the long-term historical affinity between low-budget production practices and the genre, Spadoni thus argues that "the technically challenged sound transition cinema was the birthplace of the horror film" (124). *Uncanny Bodies* impressively persuades one to think anew about films which have attracted a terrifyingly voluminous literature over the years. Like Alexander Nemerov's *Icons of Grief: Val Lewton's Home Front Pictures* (University of California Press, 2005), with which it shares an old dark publishing house, *Uncanny Bodies* carefully marries a precise and focused scholarship with intense but modestly expressed fandom. Self-defined *enfants terribles* of sleaze study should take note. © 2010 Martin Fradley

MARTIN FRADLEY teaches at the University of Manchester, U.K.

BOOK DATA Jeffrey Sconce (ed.), *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007. $84.95 cloth; $23.95 paper. 352 pages.

Robert Spadoni, *Uncanny Bodies: The Coming of Sound and the Origins of the Horror Genre.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. $60.00 cloth; $26.95 paper.

# LOVELY DAY FOR A NECKTIE PARTY

It's the faces that get to you in post-lynching photographs—not just the faces of the black victims, distended beyond recognition, but the living faces of their white victimizers, looking into the camera. These men ran no risk of prosecution for their crimes at the local level and did not see themselves as lawless "Western" vigilantes. The men in the photographs felt *entitled* to take the law into their own hands—"the legal system bestowed too many rights on black criminals and offered too little respect for white victims" (25), as Amy Louise Wood paraphrases their opinion in *Lynching and Spectacle*—by virtue of who they were and what they stood for. In this sense their present-day heirs are not just those who commit less public forms of racial violence, but also those who bomb abortion clinics or molest child molesters—not to mention those at higher levels who would lock up suspected "terrorists" and throw away the key. All these see themselves as guardians of a "purity" that transcends courtroom legalism, be this the purity of Southern white womanhood, that of children (born or unborn), or that of the U.S. itself (go figure).

There is no contrition on the faces in the photographs, no regret, no gloating, no Abu Ghraib-style acting out. These are faces of men who had wanted to be in on the action, who now want to be witnessed by others like them as having been part of the action. They pose in a proprietary way, much as hunters pose with their prey in hunting photographs (96). Photography could make a lynching a special occasion, worthy of commemoration and dissemination. But photographs depend upon context for their power. The popularity of picture postcards depicting lynchings was boosted by the U.S. Postal Service's introduction of Rural Free Delivery in 1898, and declined once newspapers began publishing more photographs of lynchings. But before this could happen, there was D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, which opened in Atlanta in 1915, a few months after the lynching of Leo Frank in nearby Marietta, Georgia—the lynching around which Matthew H. Bernstein's fine new book, *Screening a Lynching*, centers.

*The Birth of a Nation*, to begin with, marks a watershed. "In some Deep South states, Klan regalia and souvenirs were sold in theaters and ushers were costumed in Klan garb. Some theater managers . . . promoted the film by having horsemen dressed as Klansmen march through town in advance of the screening" (*Lynching and Spectacle*, 157). At one level, it "transformed audiences into lynching spectators and made their spectatorship of violence respectable, even righteous" (150). The Klan revived in the wake of the film's popularity. At another level, the claims to truthfulness that Griffith trumpeted were pitched to those who had a prior investment in the version of history *The Birth of a Nation* propounded. African American protests, which were quick to indicate, rightly, that Griffith's fetishism of veracity masked a great many historical errors in the film, were to no avail among Southern white audiences, who became more determined than ever to defend the film. (Louis Hartz once remarked that there can be an appalling complexity to innocence, particularly when your point of departure is guilt.) The "NAACP and others bestowed on *Birth* a degree of visual power and influence that Griffith and the film's supporters also [claimed] for it" (167). But film too depends upon context for its power. "An alternative form of lynching spectatorship . . . which impelled viewers . . . to bear witness to white injustice and brutality" (183) had come into existence, and could now be built upon. The "same images that had constructed and reinforced white supremacy came to have an alternative symbolic power, one which gave vitality and strength to the antilynching movement . . . if lynching rested on spectacle, it also fell on spectacle" (4). It is in this sense that "Oscar Micheaux's antilynching films *Within Our Gates* (1920) and *The Gunsaulus Mystery* (1921), the latter pieced together from elements of the Leo Frank lynching" of 1915, were "successful cinematic rejoinders to *Birth*" (175), rejoinders that were however to be seen by comparatively few spectators.

It is here that Wood's *Lynching and Spectacle* and Bernstein's *Screening a Lynching*—two excellent examples of University Press publishing at its best—intersect most usefully. It is a grim confluence, but these two books, with their different remits, complement each other admirably. (Cards-on-the-table time: Bernstein is among other things Book Review Editor of *Film Quarterly*. Wood also singles him out in her acknowledgments for his help with her film chapters.) *Screening a Lynching* breaks new ground not in its account of Leo Frank's lynching, a sensation that had been covered before, but in its sensitive, detailed accounts of the story's media history. (The dramatic appeal is obvious: Frank, a Jewish—hence "Yankee," "carpetbagger," etc.—factory manager, is

*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3, pps 82–83, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.63.3.83

arrested in 1913 for the murder of one of his female employees, Mary Phagan, and convicted on the basis of what was probably perjured testimony. Sentenced to death, Frank's appeals are denied by the Georgia, then the U.S. Supreme Courts. The Georgia Prison Commission refused to commute Frank's death sentence to one of life imprisonment. Governor John Slaton commuted it anyway. Frank was abducted from jail and lynched in 1915.) Bernstein's account covers Micheaux's *Murder in Harlem* (1936); Fritz Lang's first U.S. film, *Fury* (also 1936)—which is also covered in greater detail by Amy Wood (as being about lynching in general, and not Leo Frank's lynching in particular); Mervyn LeRoy's *They Won't Forget* (1937); the 1963 *Profiles in Courage* television episode, "John M. Slaton"; and the NBC miniseries, *The Murder of Mary Phagan* from 1988.

Leo Frank's trial and lynching cast a long shadow over U.S. film and television. *Screening a Lynching* covers not only Griffith, Micheaux, Leroy and Lang, but also Robert Rossen, Lana Turner, Elisha Cook, Jr., Claude Rains, Walter Matthau, Jack Lemmon, Kevin Spacey, the two George Stevenses, and Maurice Jarre. Amy Wood's treatment of *Fury* adds Spencer Tracy and Sylvia Sydney; all in all, quite a roster. Bernstein gives us a cross-section of U.S. film history, and a survey of censorship practices and protocols. The films he examines "provide a remarkable opportunity to explore how the same historical event can be represented on screen by different storytellers across five decades in closely related media. The differences among them—in terms of the details they employ, the characterizations they offer, the genre conventions they employ, and their visual style—are as fascinating as their similarities" (251). What isn't shown or said on screen, what is elided or left obscure, can tell us much. *They Won't Forget*, "by addressing lynching . . . became one of the most controversial message movies of the decade" (61), even though the word "lynch" does not appear in its script (82). Lang's *Fury* "shows in explicit detail the dynamics of a lynch mob in action" and "details the glee of the lynch mob with chilling directness" (93). *Fury* was thus to prove indispensable to the NAACP and other reformers, even though its depiction of lynching is "sanitized—the would-be victim is white; he survives; the lynch mob is exonerated; and racism and white supremacy remain unexamined" (*Lynching and Spectacle*, 255). *Fury* would nevertheless "bring home to America what mob violence really means" (223), in the words of the NAACP's Water White, who knew what he was talking about.

Depicting "lynching on screen was not in itself controversial but . . . doing so within a context that pointed an accusatory finger at the South most certainly was" (229), because of the Hays Code, and its prototypical version of what was later to be termed "political correctness": "any group that might take offence at a picture and sue or lobby the industry had to be represented in the best possible light . . . For this reason, Hollywood was loath to release any pictures that would flout Jim Crow convention or impugn white southern character" (228). Consequently, MGM marketed *Fury* as a "drama that . . . could happen to any one of us" (237), which "attacked lynching as an American rather than a white man's or a southern travesty" of justice (231). (There may for the record have been 288 lynchings of white men between 1882–1930, but "this number pales in comparison with the estimated 2500 black lynchings between 1880 and 1930—nearly one per week during a fifty year span" [*Screening a Lynching*, 1].)

All the same, activists from the 1930s onward "succeeded in shifting the terms of the debate" about lynching, "so that forward-looking white southerners were compelled to adopt the position that lynching was barbaric and disgraceful, even as they continued to defend white supremacy [and] rail against black criminality" (*Lynching and Spectacle*, 261). In order "to maintain their claims to racial supremacy, southerners had to disavow lynching" (262), which is progress of a sort. Racial violence could now be regarded as being at variance with U.S. ideals, while the prejudice that had underlain racial violence could continue apace. And continue it did, until the civil rights movement of the 1960s and beyond.

That even this does not conclude our sorry, gut-wrenching story can be seen from the evidence adduced by Matthew Bernstein about the televisual adaptations of the Leo Frank case. *The Murder of Mary Phagan*'s "depiction of its black characters clearly benefited from the achievements of the civil rights movement" (253). But in the 1963 "John M. Slaton" episode of *Profiles in Courage*, neither Leo Frank nor Jim Conley, whose (presumably perjured, and certainly coached) testimony was instrumental in condemning Frank, appears on screen; that "Conley was black is never even stated. To imply that a black man committed perjury about the murder of a white girl was too risky in the early 1960s, crucial years in the civil rights struggle" (162), even if "anti-Semitism as a factor" (163) could for once be foregrounded. This too is progress of a sort. Let those take comfort who can.

PAUL THOMAS teaches politics at the University of California, Berkeley.

BOOK DATA Matthew H. Bernstein, *Screening a Lynching: The Leo Frank Case on Film and Television.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009. $69.95 cloth; $24.95 paper. 352 pages.

Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890–1940.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. $39.95 cloth. 384 pages.